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The Climbers

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

By

CLYDE FITCH

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CLYDE FITCH

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TO

CHARLES T. MATHEWS

IN GRATEFUL RECOGNITION OF HIS
TRUE FRIENDSHIP AND LOYAL ENTHUSIASM
FROM THE BEGINNING

C. F.

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THE CLIMBERS

ACT I. IN LATE WINTER.
At the Hunters'.

ACT II. THE FOLLOWING CHRISTMAS EVE.
At the Sterlings'.

ACT III. CHRISTMAS DAY.
At the Hermitage, by the Bronx River

ACT IV. THE DAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.
At the Sterlings'.

NEW YORK: TO-DAY

THE PEOPLE IN THE PLAY

RICHARD STERLING.
EDWARD WARDEN.
FREDERICK MASON.
JOHNNY TROTTER.
GODESBY.
DR. STEINART.
RYDER.
SERVANT *at the Hermitage.*
JORDAN. *Butler at the Sterlings'.*
LEONARD. *Footman at the Sterlings'.*
MASTER STERLING.
SERVANTS.

MRS. STERLING (*née Blanche Hunter*).
MISS HUNTER.
MRS. HUNTER.
JESSICA HUNTER.
CLARA HUNTER.
MISS GODESBY.
MISS SILLERTON.
TOMPSON. *Mrs. Hunter's Maid.*
MARIE. *Clara Hunter's Maid.*

Originally produced at the Bijou Theatre, New York, January 21, 1901, with the following cast:—

Richard Sterling	Mr. Frank Worthing
Edward Warden	Mr. Robert Edeson
Frederick Mason	Mr. John Flood
Johnny Trotter	Mr. Ferdinand Gottschalk
Dr. Steinart	Mr. George C. Boniface
Godesby	Mr. J. B. Sturges
Ryder	Mr. Kinard
Servant at the Hermitage	Mr. Henry Warwick
Jordan, Leonard, A Footman — Servants at the Hunters'	Mr. Edward Moreland; Mr. Henry Stokes; Mr. Frederick Wallace
Richard Sterling, Jr.	Master Harry Wright
Mrs. Hunter	Mrs. Madge Carr Cook
Mrs. Sterling (*née* Blanche Hunter)	Miss Amelia Bingham
Jessica Hunter	Miss Maud Monroe
Clara Hunter	Miss Minnie Dupree
Miss Hunter	Miss Annie Irish
Miss Godesby	Miss Clara Bloodgood
Miss Sillerton	Miss Ysobel Haskins
Tompson, Marie — Maids at the Hunters'	Miss Lillian Eldredge; Miss Florence Lloyd

Produced at the Comedy Theatre, London, September 5, 1903, with the following cast:—

Richard Sterling	Mr. Sydney Valentine
Edward Warden	Mr. Reeves-Smith
Frederick Mason	Mr. J. L. Mackay
Johnny Trotter	Mr. G. M. Graham
Godesby	Mr. Horace Pollock
Dr. Steinart	Mr. Howard Sturges
Master Sterling	Miss Maidie Andrews
Ryder	Mr. Henry Howard
Jordan	Mr. Elgar B. Payne
Leonard	Mr. Littledale Power
Footman	Mr. Rivers Bertram
Servant	Mr. George Aubrey
Mrs. Sterling	Miss Lily Hanbury
Miss Hunter	Miss Kate Tyndall
Mrs. Hunter	Miss Lottie Venne
Jessica Hunter	Miss Alma Mara
Clara Hunter	Mrs. Mouillot
Miss Sillerton	Miss Florence Sinclair
Tompson	Miss L. Crauford
Marie	Miss Armstrong
Miss Godesby	Miss Fannie Ward

ACT I

A drawing-room at the Hunters', handsomely and artistically furnished. The woodwork and furniture are in the period of Louis XVI. The walls and furniture are covered with yellow brocade, and the curtains are of the same golden material. At the back are two large windows which give out on Fifth Avenue, opposite the Park, the trees of which are seen across the way. At Left is a double doorway, leading into the hall. At Right, opposite, is a door which leads to other rooms, and thence to other parts of the house. In the centre, at back, between the two windows, is the fireplace; on the mantel are two vases and a clock in dark blue

ormolu. There is a white and gold piano on the Right side of the room. The room suggests much wealth, and that it has been done by a professional decorator; the personal note of taste is lacking.

It is four o'clock in the afternoon. The shades of the windows are drawn down. There are rows and rows of camp-chairs filling the entire room. The curtain rises slowly. After a moment, JORDAN, *the butler, and* LEONARD, *a footman, enter from the Left and begin to gather together and carry out the camp-chairs. They do this with very serious faces, and take great pains to step softly and to make no noise. They enter a second time for more chairs.*

JORDAN. [*Whispers to* LEONARD.] When are they coming for the chairs?

LEONARD. [*Whispers back.*] To-night. Say, it was fine, wasn't it!

JORDAN. Grand!

[*They go out with the chairs and immediately reënter for more. They are followed in this time by a lady's maid,* TOMPSON; *she is not a young woman. As she crosses the room she stoops and picks up a faded flower which has fallen from some emblem. She goes to the window at Right, and peeps out. She turns around and looks at the others. They all speak in subdued voices.*

TOMPSON. Jordan, what do you think — can we raise the shades now?

JORDAN. Yes, of course — after they've left the house it's all over as far as we here are concerned.

[*She raises both shades.*

TOMPSON. Phew! what an odor of flowers!

[*She opens one of the windows a little.*

[MARIE, *a young, pretty, French woman, enters from the Right.*

MARIE. Will I help you?

TOMPSON. Just with this table, thank you, Marie. [*They begin to rearrange the room, putting it in its normal condition. They replace the table and put back the ornaments upon it.*] Poor Mr. Hunter, and him so fond of mince pie. I shall never forget how that man ate mince pie.

[*She sighs lugubriously and continues her labor with the room.*

LEONARD. I hope as how it's not going to make any difference with us.

JORDAN. [*Pompously.*] Of course not; wasn't Mr. Hunter a millionnaire?

TOMPSON. Some millionnaires I've known

turned out poor as Job's turkey in their coffins!

MARIE. What you say? You tink we shall 'ave some of madame's or ze young ladies' dresses?

TOMPSON. [*Hopefully.*] Perhaps.

MARIE. I 'ave already made my choice. I like ze pale pink of Mees Jessie.

LEONARD. Sh! I heard a carridge.

TOMPSON. Then they're coming back.

[MARIE *quickly goes out Right.*

JORDAN. [*To* LEONARD, *hurriedly, as he quickly goes out Left.*] Take them last two chairs!

[LEONARD, *with the chairs, follows* JORDAN *out Left.* TOMPSON *hastily puts back a last arm-chair to its usual position in the room and goes out Right.* MRS. HUNTER *enters Left, followed by her three daughters,* BLANCHE, JESSICA, *and* CLARA, *and* MASTER STERLING, *who is*

a small, attractive child, five years of age. All are in the deepest conventional mourning, MRS. HUNTER *in widow's weeds and* CLARA *with a heavy, black chiffon veil; the* BOY *is also dressed in conventional mourning. As soon as they enter, all four women lift their veils.* MRS. HUNTER *is a well-preserved woman, with a pretty, rather foolish, and somewhat querulous face. Her figure is the latest mode.* BLANCHE STERLING, *her oldest daughter, is her antithesis, — a handsome, dignified woman, young, sincere, and showing, in her attitude to the others and in her own point of view, the warmth of a true, evenly-balanced nature.* JESSICA *is a typical second child, — nice, good, self-effacing, sympathetic, unspoiled.* CLARA *is her opposite, — spoiled, petulant, pretty, pert, and selfish.*

MRS. HUNTER. [*With a long sigh.*] Oh, I am so glad to be back home and the whole thing over without a hitch!

[*She sinks with a great sigh of relief into a big chair.*

BLANCHE. [*Takes her son to* MRS. HUNTER.] Kiss grandmother good-by, and then Leonard will take you home.

MRS. HUNTER. Good-by, dear. Be a good boy. Don't eat too much candy.

[*Kisses him carelessly.*

MASTER STERLING. Good-by. [*Runs towards the door Left, shouting happily.*] Leonard! Leonard!

MRS. HUNTER. [*Tearfully.*] My dears, it was a great success! Everybody was there!

[*The three younger women stand and look about the room, as if it were strange to them — as if it were empty. There is a moment's silence.*

BLANCHE. [*Tenderly.*] Mother, why don't you take off your bonnet?

MRS. HUNTER. Take it off for me; it *will* be a great relief.

BLANCHE. Help me, Jess.

MRS. HUNTER. [*Irritably.*] Yes, *do* something, Jessie. You've mortified me terribly to-day! That child hasn't shed a tear. People'll think you didn't love your father. [*The two are taking off* MRS. HUNTER'S *bonnet.* MRS. HUNTER *waits for an answer from* JESSICA; *none comes.*] I never saw any one so heartless! [*Tearful again.*] And her father adored her. *She* was one of the things we quarrelled *most* about!

[*Over* MRS. HUNTER'S *head* BLANCHE *exchanges a sympathetic look with* JESSICA *to show she understands.*

CLARA. I'm sure *I've* cried enough. I've cried buckets.

[*She goes to* MRS. HUNTER *as* BLANCHE *and* JESSICA *take away the bonnet and veil and put them on the piano.*

MRS. HUNTER. [*Kissing Clara.*] Yes, dear, you are your mother's own child. And *you* lose the most by it, too.

[*Leaning against the side of her mother's chair, with one arm about her mother.*

CLARA. Yes, indeed, instead of coming out next month, and having a perfectly lovely winter, I'll have to mope the whole season, and, if I don't look out, be a wallflower without ever having been a bud!

MRS. HUNTER. [*Half amused but feeling* CLARA'S *remark is perhaps not quite the right thing.*] Sh—

[*During* CLARA'S *speech above,* BLANCHE *has*

taken JESSICA *in her arms a moment and kissed her tenderly, slowly. They rejoin* MRS. HUNTER, BLANCHE *wiping her eyes,* JESSICA *still tearless.*

CLARA. And think of all the clothes we brought home from Paris last month!

MRS. HUNTER. My dear, don't think of clothes — think of your poor father! That street dress of mine will dye very well, and we'll give the rest to your aunt and cousins.

BLANCHE. Mother, don't you want to go upstairs?

JESSICA. [*Sincerely moved.*] Yes, I hate this room now.

MRS. HUNTER. [*Rising.*] Hate this room! When we've just had it done! Louis Kinge!

BLANCHE. Louis *Quinze*, dear! She means the associations now, mother.

MRS. HUNTER. Oh, yes, but that's weak and

foolish, Jessie. No, Blanche — [*Sitting again.*] — I'm too exhausted to move. Ring for tea.

[BLANCHE *rings the bell beside the mantel.*

CLARA. [*Crossing to piano, forgets and starts to play a music-hall song, but* MRS. HUNTER *stops her.*] Oh, yes, tea! I'm starved!

MRS. HUNTER. Clara, darling! As if you could be hungry at such a time!

[JORDAN *enters Left.*

BLANCHE. Tea, Jordan.

JORDAN. Yes, madam.

[*He goes out Left.*

MRS. HUNTER. Girls, everybody in town was there! I'm sure even your father himself couldn't have complained.

BLANCHE. Mother!

MRS. HUNTER. Well, you know he always found fault with my *parties* being too mixed. He

wouldn't realize I couldn't throw over all my old set when I married into his, — not that I ever acknowledged I was your father's inferior. I consider my family was just as good as his, only we were *Presbyterians!*

BLANCHE. Mother, dear, take off your gloves.

MRS. HUNTER. I thought I had. [*Crying.*] I'm so heartbroken I don't know what I'm doing.

[*Taking off her gloves.*

[BLANCHE *and* CLARA *comfort their mother.*

JESSICA. Here's the tea —

[JORDAN *and* LEONARD *enter with large, silver tray, with tea, cups, and thin bread-and-butter sandwiches. They place them on small tea-table which* JESSICA *arranges for them.*

MRS. HUNTER. I'm afraid I can't touch it.

[*Taking her place behind tea-table and biting eagerly into a sandwich.*

JESSICA. [*Dryly.*] Try.

[BLANCHE *pours tea for them all, which they take in turn.*

MRS. HUNTER. [*Eating.*] One thing I was furious about, — did you see the Witherspoons *here* at the house?

CLARA. *I* did.

MRS. HUNTER. The idea! When I've never called on them. They are the worst social pushers I've ever known.

[*She takes another sandwich.*

CLARA. Trying to make people think they are on our visiting list! Using even a funeral to get in!

MRS. HUNTER. But I *was* glad the Worthings were here, and I thought it *sweet* of old Mr. Dormer to go even to the cemetery. [*Voice breaks a little.*] He never goes to balls any more, and, they say, catches cold at the slightest change of temperature

[*She takes a third sandwich.*

BLANCHE. A great many people loved father.

MRS. HUNTER. [*Irritably.*] They ought to've. It was really foolish the way he was always doing something for somebody! How good these sandwiches are! [*Spoken very plaintively.*

JESSICA. Shall we have to economize now, mother?

MRS. HUNTER. Of course not; how dare you suggest such an injustice to your *father*, and *before* the flowers are withered on his grave!

[*Again becoming tearful.*

[JORDAN *enters Left with a small silver tray, heaping full of letters.*

Has the new writing paper come?

BLANCHE. [*Who takes the letters and looks through them, giving some to her mother.*] Yes.

[BLANCHE *reads a letter, and passes it to* JESSICA.

MRS. HUNTER. Is the black border broad enough? They said it was the thing.

CLARA. If you had it any broader, you'd have to get white ink to write with!

MRS. HUNTER. [*Sweetly.*] Don't be impertinent, darling!

[*Reading another letter.*

[*Enter* MISS RUTH HUNTER. *She is an unmarried woman between thirty and forty years of age, handsome, distinguished; an aristocrat, without any pretensions; simple, unaffected, and direct in her effort to do kindnesses where they are not absolutely undeserved. She enters the room as if she carried with her an atmosphere of pure ozone. This affects all those in it. She is dressed in deep mourning and wears a thick chiffon veil, which she removes as she enters.*

RUTH. Oh! you're having tea!

[*Glad that they are.*

MRS. HUNTER. [*Taking a second cup.*] I thought the children *ought* to.

RUTH. Of course they ought and so ought you, if you haven't.

MRS. HUNTER. Oh, I've *trifled* with something.

JESSICA. Sit here, Aunt Ruth.

BLANCHE. Will you have a cup, Aunt Ruth?

RUTH. Yes, dear, I'm feeling very hungry.

[*Sitting on the sofa beside* JESSICA *and pressing her hand as she does so.*

MRS. HUNTER. Hungry! *How can you!*

RUTH. Because I'm not a *hypocrite!*

MRS. HUNTER. [*Whimpering.*] I suppose that's a slur at me!

RUTH. If the slipper fits! But I confess I haven't eaten much for several days; I couldn't

touch anything this morning, and I begin to feel exhausted; I must have food and, thank Heaven, I want it. Thank you.

[*To* BLANCHE, *taking the cup from her.*

MRS. HUNTER. I think it's awful, Ruth, and I feel I have a right to say it — I think you owed it to my feelings to have worn a long veil; people will think you didn't love your brother.

RUTH. [*Dryly.*] Will they? Let them! You know as well as I do that George loathed the very idea of crêpe and all display of mourning.

MRS. HUNTER. [*Feeling out of her element, changes the subject.*] You stayed behind?

RUTH. Yes. I wanted to be the last there. [*Her voice chokes; she tries to control herself.*] Ah! you see my nerves are all gone to pieces. I *won't* cry any more!

MRS. HUNTER. I don't see how you could

bear it — staying; but you never had any heart Ruth.

RUTH. [*Mechanically, biting her lips hard to keep the tears back.*] Haven't I?

MRS. HUNTER. My darling husband always felt that defect in you.

RUTH. George?

MRS. HUNTER. He resented your treatment of me, and often said so.

RUTH. [*Very quietly, but with determination.*] Please be careful. Don't talk to me like this about my brother, Florence — or you'll make me say something I shall be sorry for.

MRS. HUNTER. I don't care! It wore on him, the way you treated me. I put up with it for his sake, but it helped undermine his health.

RUTH. Florence, stop!

MRS. HUNTER. [*In foolish anger, the resentment*

of years bursting out.] I *won't* stop! I'm alone now, and the least you can do is to see that people who've fought shy of me take me up and give me my due. You've been a cruel, selfish sister-in-law, and your own brother saw and hated you for it!

BLANCHE. *Mother!*

RUTH. [*Outraged.*] Send your daughters out of the room; I wish to answer you alone.

MRS. HUNTER. [*Frightened.*] No! what you have to say to me I prefer my children to hear!

[CLARA *comes over to her mother and puts her arm about her.*

RUTH. I can't remain quiet any longer. George — [*She almost breaks down, but she controls herself.*] This funeral is enough, with its show and worldliness! I don't believe there was a soul in the church you didn't see! Look at your handkerchief!

Real grief isn't measured by the width of a black border. I'm ashamed of you, Florence! I never liked you very much, although I tried to for your husband's sake, but now I'm even more ashamed of you. My dear brother is gone, and there need be no further bond between us, but I want you to understand the true reason why, from to-day, I keep away from you. This funeral was revolting to me!—a show spectacle, a social function, and for *him* who you know *hated* the very thing. [*She stops a moment to control her tears and her anger.*] I saw the reporters there, and I heard your message to them, and I contradicted it. I begged them not to use your information, and they were gentlemen and promised me not to. You are, and always have been, a silly, frivolous woman. I don't doubt you loved your husband as much as you could any man, but it wasn't enough for me;

he was worth being adored by the best and noblest woman in the world. I've stood by all these years, trying with my love and silent sympathy to be some comfort to him — but I saw the disappointment and disillusionment eat away the very *hope* of happiness out of his heart. I tried to help him by helping you in your foolish ambitions, doing what I could to give my brother's wife the social position *his name* entitled her to!

MRS. HUNTER. That's not true; I've had to fight it out all alone!

RUTH. It was not my fault if my best friends found you intolerable; *I* couldn't blame them. Well, now it's over! George is at rest, please God. You are a rich woman to do what you please. Go, and do it! and Heaven forgive you for ruining my brother's life! I'm sorry to have said all this before your children. Blanche, you

know how dearly I love you, and I hope you have forgiven me by now for my opposition to your marriage.

BLANCHE. Of course I've forgiven you, but you were always unjust to Dick.

RUTH. Yes; I didn't like your husband then, and I didn't believe in him, but I like him better now. And I am going to put all my affairs in his hands. I couldn't show — surely — a better proof of confidence and liking than that: to trust him as I did — your father. I hope I shall see much of you and Jessica. As for you, Clara, I must be honest —

CLARA. [*Interrupting her.*] Oh, I know you've always hated me! The presents you gave the other girls were always twice as nice as I got!

MRS. HUNTER. [*Sympathetically.*] Come here, darling.

[CLARA *goes and puts her arms about her mother's neck.*

RUTH. You are your mother's own child, Clara, and I never could pretend anything I didn't feel. [*She turns to* BLANCHE *and* JESSICA, *who stand side by side.*] You two are all I have left in the world of my brother. [*She kisses them, and lets the tears come, this time without struggling.*] Take pity on your old-maid aunt and come and see me, won't you, *often* — [*Trying to smile away her tears.*] And now good-by!

JESSICA AND RUTH. [*Taking her hands.*] Good-by.

[RUTH *looks about the room to say good-by to it; she cries and hurriedly begins pulling down her veil, and starts to go out as* JORDAN *enters Left and announces "Mr. Mason!"*

[MRS. HUNTER *fluffs her hair a little and hopes she looks becoming.*

[MASON *is a typical New Yorker, well built, well preserved, dignified, and good-looking, — a solid man in every sense of the word.*

MASON. [*Meeting* RUTH, *shakes hands with her.*] Miss Hunter.

RUTH. I am just going, Mr. Mason.

MASON. You must stay. I sent word to your house this morning to meet me here.

[*Shakes hands with the others.*

RUTH. I was here all night.

MRS. HUNTER. Will you have some tea? The children were hungry.

MASON. No, thank you. [*To* BLANCHE.] Isn't your husband here?

[JORDAN, *at a signal from* MRS. HUNTER, *removes the tea things.*

BLANCHE. No, he left us at the door when we came back.

MASON. Didn't he get a letter from me this morning asking him to meet me here?

BLANCHE. Oh, yes, he did mention a letter at breakfast, but my thoughts were away. He has been very much worried lately over his affairs; he doesn't confide in me, but I see it. I wish you could advise him, Mr. Mason.

MASON. I cannot advise your husband if he won't *ask* my advice. I don't think we'll wait for Mr. Sterling.

[*Gives chair to* MRS. HUNTER.

MRS. HUNTER. I suppose you've come about all the horrid business. Why not just tell us how much our income is, and let all the details go. I really think the details are more than I can bear to-day.

MASON. That can be certainly as you wish; but I felt — as your business adviser — and besides I promised my old friend, your husband — it was my duty to let you know how matters stand with the least possible delay.

MRS. HUNTER. [*Beginning to break down.*] George! George!

[RUTH *looks at her, furious, and bites her lips hard.* JESSICA *is standing with her back toward them.*

MASON. Well, then —

[*He is interrupted by* MRS. HUNTER, *who sees* JESSICA.

MRS. HUNTER. Jess! How rude you are! Turn around this minute! [JESSICA *does not move.*] What do you mean! Excuse me, Mr. Mason! Jess! Such disrespect to your father's will! Turn around! [*Angry.*] Do you hear me?

JESSICA. [*With her back still turned, her shoulders shaking, speaks in a voice broken with sobs.*] Leave me alone! Leave me alone —

[*She sits in a chair beside her and leans her arms upon its back and buries her face in her arms.*

BLANCHE. [*With her hand on her mother's arm.*] Mother! Don't worry her!

MRS. HUNTER. Go on, please, Mr. Mason, and remember, *spare us the details.* What is our income?

MASON. Mrs. Hunter, there is no income.

MRS. HUNTER. [*Quietly, not at all grasping what he means.*] No income! How is our money —

MASON. I am sorry to say there is *no* money.

MRS. HUNTER. [*Echoes weakly.*] No money?

MASON. Not a penny!

MRS. HUNTER. [*Realizing now what he means, cries out in a loud, hard, amazed voice.*] *What!*

BLANCHE. [*With her hand on her shoulder.*] Mother!

MRS. HUNTER. I don't believe it!

RUTH. [*To* MASON.] My good friend, do you mean that literally — that my brother died without leaving *any* money behind him?

MRS. HUNTER. For his wife and family?

MASON. I mean just that.

RUTH. But how?

MRS. HUNTER. Yes, *tell us the details* — every one of them! You can't imagine the shock this is to me!

MASON. Hunter sent for me two days before he died, and told me things had gone badly with him last year, but it seemed impossible to retrench his expenses.

RUTH. *Are you listening, Florence?*

MRS. HUNTER. Yes, of course I am; your brother was a very extravagant man!

MASON. This year, with his third daughter coming out, there was need of more money than ever. He was harassed nearly to death with financial worries. [RUTH *begins to cry softly.* MRS. HUNTER *gets angrier and angrier.*] And finally, in sheer desperation, and trusting to the advice of the Storrings, he risked everything he had with them in the Consolidated Copper. The day after, he was taken ill. You know what happened. The Storrings, Hunter, and others were ruined absolutely; the next day Hunter died.

RUTH. Poor George! Why didn't he come to me; he must have known that everything I had was his!

MASON. He was too ill when the final blow came to realize it.

MRS. HUNTER. [*Angry.*] But his *life insurance*, — there was a big policy in my name.

MASON. He had been obliged to let that lapse.

MRS. HUNTER. You mean I haven't even my *life insurance*?

MASON. As I said, there is nothing, except this house, and that is —

MRS. HUNTER. [*Rises indignantly and almost screams in angry hysterics.*] *Mortgaged*. I presume! Oh, it's insulting! It's an indignity. It's — it's — Oh, well, it's just like my husband, there!

BLANCHE. Mother!

[RUTH *rises, and, taking* MASON'S *arm, leads him aside.*

MRS. HUNTER. [*To* BLANCHE.] Oh, don't talk to me now! You always preferred your father,

and now you're punished for it! He has wilfully left your mother and sisters paupers!

BLANCHE. How can you speak like that! Surely you know father must have suffered more than we could when he realized he was leaving nothing for you.

JESSICA. Yes, and it was for us too that he lost all. It was our extravagance.

MRS. HUNTER. Hush! How dare *you* side against me, too?

RUTH. Florence —

MRS. HUNTER. Well, Ruth, what do you think of your brother now?

BLANCHE. [*To her mother.*] Don't!

MASON. By whom were the arrangements for to-day made?

MRS. HUNTER. My son-in-law had most pressing business, and his friend —

BLANCHE. The friend of all of us —

MRS. HUNTER. Yes, of course, Mr. Warden saw to everything.

BLANCHE. He will be here any moment!

MASON. When he comes, will you send him on to me, please?

RUTH. Yes.

MASON. Very well. Good-by. [*Shakes hands with* BLANCHE.] I am very sorry to have been the bearer of such bad news.

MRS. HUNTER. [*Shaking hands with him.*] Please overlook anything I may have said; at such a moment, with the loss of all my money — and my dear husband — I don't know *what* to say!

MASON. Naturally. [*To the others.*] Good-by. [*To* RUTH, *who follows him.*] I'll come to see you in the morning.

[*As they shake hands.*

RUTH. And I can then tell you what I settle here now. [MASON *goes out Left.*] Florence, I'm very sorry —

[*Interrupted.*

MRS. HUNTER. Oh! *You!* Sorry!

RUTH. Yes, very, very sorry, — first, that I spoke as I did just now.

MRS. HUNTER. It's too late to be sorry for that now.

RUTH. No, it isn't, and I'll prove to you I mean it. Come, we'll talk things over.

MRS. HUNTER. Go away! I don't want you to prove anything to me! [MRS. HUNTER *and* CLARA *sit side by side on the sofa.* BLANCHE *and* JESSICA *are in chairs near the table.* RUTH *sits beside* BLANCHE. MRS. HUNTER *has something the manner of porcupines and shows a set determination to accept nothing by way of comfort*

or expedient. BLANCHE *looks hopeful and ready to take the helm for the family.* JESSICA *will back up* BLANCHE.] My happiness in this world is over. What have I to live for?

RUTH. Your children!

MRS. HUNTER. Beggars like myself!

BLANCHE. But your children will work for you.

CLARA. Work! I see myself.

RUTH. So do I.

MRS. HUNTER. My children work! Don't be absurd!

JESSICA. It is not absurd! I can certainly earn my own living somehow and so can Clara.

CLARA. Doing *what*, I should like to know! I see myself!

BLANCHE. Jess is right. I'll take care of this family — father always said I was "his own child." I'll do my best to take his place.

RUTH. I will gladly give Jessica a home.

MRS. HUNTER. [*Whimpers.*] You'd rob me of my children, too!

JESSICA. Thank you, Aunt Ruth, but I must stay with mother and be Blanche's right-hand man!

CLARA. I might go on the stage.

MRS. HUNTER. My dear, smart people don't any more.

CLARA. I'd like to be a sort of Anna Held.

JESSICA. I don't see why I couldn't learn typewriting, Blanche?

MRS. HUNTER. Huh! Why, you could never even learn to play the piano ; I don't think you'd be much good at typewriting.

CLARA. You want to be a typewriter, because in the papers they always have an old gentleman taking them to theatres and supper! No, sir, if

there is to be any "old man's darling" in this family, *I'll* be *it!*

RUTH. [*Dryly.*] You'll have to learn to spell correctly first!

CLARA. [*Superciliously.*] Humph!

JESSICA. There are lots of ways nowadays for women to earn their living.

RUTH. Yes, typewriting we will consider.

MRS. HUNTER. Never!

[*No one pays any attention to her except* CLARA, *who agrees with her.*

RUTH. Jess, you learned enough to *teach*, didn't you? — even at that fashionable school your mother sent you to?

JESSICA. Oh, yes, I think I could teach.

MRS. HUNTER. Never!

[*Still no one pays any attention except* CLARA, *who again agrees with her.*

CLARA. No, indeed! *I* wouldn't teach!

BLANCHE. If we only knew some nice elderly woman who wanted a companion, Jess would be a godsend.

CLARA. If she was a nice *old* lady with lots of money and delicate health, I wouldn't mind that position myself.

RUTH. Clara, you seem to take this matter as a supreme joke!

MRS. HUNTER. [*With mock humility.*] May *I* speak? [*She waits. All turn to her. A moment's silence.*] MAY I speak?

RUTH. Yes, yes. Go on, Florence; don't you see we're listening?

MRS. HUNTER. I didn't know! I've been so completely ignored in this entire conversation. But there is one thing for the girls — the easiest possible way for them to earn their living —

which you don't seem for a moment to have thought of!

[*She waits with a smile of coming triumph on her face.*

RUTH. Nursing!

MRS. HUNTER. [*Disgusted.*] No!

CLARA. Manicuring?

MRS. HUNTER. *Darling!*

BLANCHE. Designing dresses and hats?

MRS. HUNTER. No!

JESSICA. Book-keeping?

MRS. HUNTER. No.

RUTH. Then what in the world is it?

MRS. HUNTER. Marriage!

CLARA. Oh, of course!

RUTH. Humph!

[JESSICA *and* BLANCHE *exchange glances.*

MRS. HUNTER. That young Mr. Trotter would be a fine catch for Jess.

JESSICA. Who loathes him!

MRS. HUNTER. Don't be old-fashioned! He's very nice.

RUTH. A little cad, trying to get into society — nice occupation for a *man!*

JESSICA. Mother, you can't be serious.

CLARA. Why wouldn't he do for *me?*

RUTH. He *would!* The very thing!

MRS. HUNTER. We'll see, darling; I think Europe is the place for you. I don't believe all the titles are gobbled up yet.

RUTH. Jess, I might get you some women friends of mine, to whom you could go mornings and answer their letters.

MRS. HUNTER. I should not allow my daughter to go in that capacity to the house of any woman who had refused to call on her mother, which is the way most of your friends have treated me!

RUTH. Do you realize, Florence, this is a question of bread and butter, a practical suggestion of life, which has nothing whatever to do with the society columns of the daily papers?

MRS. HUNTER. I do *not* intend that my daughters shall lose their positions because their father has been — what shall we call it — criminally negligent of them.

RUTH. [*Rising.*] How dare you! You are to blame for it all. If you say another word injurious to my brother's memory, I'll leave this house and let you starve for all I'll do for you.

BLANCHE. Aunt Ruth, please, for father's sake —

CLARA. Well, this house is ours, anyway!

BLANCHE. That is what *I've* been thinking of. The house is yours. It's huge. You don't need it. You must either give it up altogether —

MRS. HUNTER. [*Interrupts.*] *What! Leave it. My house! Never!*

BLANCHE. Or — let out floors to one or two friends, — bachelor friends. Mr. Mason, perhaps —

CLARA. [*Interrupts, rising, furious.*] Take in *boarders!*

MRS. HUNTER. [*Who has listened aghast, now rises in outraged dignity; she stands a moment glaring at* BLANCHE, *then speaks.*] Take — [*She chokes.*] *That* is the *last straw!*

[*And she sweeps from the room Right.*

CLARA. Mama! Mama!

[*She goes out after her mother.*

[*The other three women watch the two leave the room, then turn and look at each other.*

BLANCHE. We'll manage somehow, only I think it would be easier for us to discuss all practical matters by *ourselves.*

RUTH. And I want you to understand this, girls, — I represent your dear father ; half of everything I have is yours, and you must promise me always to come to me for everything.

[STERLING *enters suddenly Left.*

[*He is a man of thirty-eight or forty, a singularly attractive personality; he is handsome and distinguished. His hair is grayer than his years may account for and his manner betrays a nervous system overtaxed and barely under control. At the moment that he enters he is evidently laboring under some especial, and only half-concealed, nervous strain. In spite of his irritability at times with his wife, there is an undercurrent of tenderness which reveals his real love for* BLANCHE.

STERLING. Oh, you're all here! Have I missed old Mason?

RUTH. Yes, but Blanche will tell you what he had to say. I'm going upstairs to try and pacify your mother. We mustn't forget she has a hard time ahead of her.

[*She goes out Right with* JESSICA.

STERLING. I suppose Mason came about the will and your father's affairs?

BLANCHE. Yes, you ought to have been here.

STERLING. [*Irritably.*] But I couldn't—I told you I couldn't!

BLANCHE. Do you realize, dear, that you haven't been able to do *anything for me* for a long time? Lately, even I hardly ever *see* you — I stay home night after night alone.

STERLING. That's your own fault, dear; Ned Warden's always ready to take you anywhere you like.

BLANCHE. [*With the ghost of a jest.*] But do you

think it's quite right for me to take up all Mr. Warden's time?

STERLING. Why not, if he likes it?

BLANCHE. And don't you think people will soon talk?

STERLING. Darling! People always talk, and who cares!

BLANCHE. It's months since you showed me any sign of affection, and now when my heart is hungrier than ever for it, — you know how I loved my father, — I long for sympathy from *you*, and you haven't once thought to take me, your wife, in your arms and hold me close and comfort me.

STERLING. I'm sorry, old girl, I'm really sorry. [*Embracing her affectionately.*] And surely you know I don't love any other woman in the world but you. [*He kisses her.*] It's only because I've been terribly worried. I don't want to bother you

with business, but I've been in an awful hole for money. I tried to make a big coup in Wall Street the other day and only succeeded getting in deeper, and for the last few days I've been nearly distracted.

BLANCHE. Why didn't you tell me?

STERLING. I thought I'd get out of it with this Consolidated Copper without worrying you.

BLANCHE. You were in that, too?

STERLING. How do you mean I, "too"?

BLANCHE. Mr. Mason has just told us *father* lost everything in it.

STERLING. [*Aghast.*] You don't mean your father hasn't left any money?

BLANCHE. Nothing.

STERLING. [*Forgetting everything but what this means to him.*] Nothing! But I was counting on your share to save me! What did the damned old fool mean?

BLANCHE. Dick!

STERLING. Forgive me, I didn't mean to say that.

BLANCHE. Oh, *who are you! What* are you! You are not the man I thought when I married you! Every day something new happens to frighten me, to threaten my love for you!

STERLING. No, no, don't say that, old girl.

[*He tries to take her hand.*

BLANCHE. What right have you to criticise my father, to curse him — and to-day!

STERLING. I don't know what I'm saying, Blanche. Try to forgive me. I wouldn't have thought of such a thing as his money to-day if it wasn't the only thing that can save me from — disgrace.

[*His voice sinking almost to a whisper and the man himself sinking into a chair*

BLANCHE. Disgrace! How? What disgrace?

[*Going to him.*

STERLING. I can't explain it; you wouldn't understand.

BLANCHE. You must explain it! *Your* disgrace is *mine.*

STERLING. [*Alarmed at having said so much, tries to retract a little.*] Disgrace was too strong a word—I didn't mean that. I'm in trouble. I'm in trouble. Good God, can't you see it? And if you love me, why don't you leave me alone?

BLANCHE. How can I go on loving you without your confidence?—without ever being suffered to give you any sympathy? Doll wives are out of fashion, and even if they weren't, I could never be one.

STERLING. [*Laughing.*] My dear, I'd never accuse you of being stuffed with sawdust.

BLANCHE. Oh, and now you joke about it Take care, Dick.

STERLING. What's this, a threat?

BLANCHE. Yes, if you like to call it that. You've been putting me more and more completely out of your life; take care that I don't finish your work and go the last step.

STERLING. [*Seizing her roughly by the wrist.*] The last step! What do you mean by that? [*Holding her hand more roughly.*] *You dare* to be unfaithful to me!

BLANCHE. What! You could think I meant that! Ugh! How could you?

STERLING. Well, what did you mean then? Eh?

[*Pulling her up close to him, her face close to his. She realizes first by the odor, then by a searching look at his face, that he is partly under the influence of liquor.*

BLANCHE. [*With pathetic shame.*] Let me go! I see what's the matter with you, but the reason is no excuse; you've been drinking.

STERLING. [*Dropping her hand.*] Ugh! The usual whimper of a woman!

[RUTH *reënters Right.*

RUTH. Well, Blanche, dear, your mother's in a calmer frame of mind, and I must go. Dick, can you lunch with me to-morrow?

STERLING. [*Hesitating, not caring about it.*] Er — to-morrow? — er —

RUTH. Oh, only for business. I must have a new business man now to do all that *he* did for me, and I'm going to try to make up to you for not having been always your — *best* friend, by putting my affairs in *your* hands.

BLANCHE. [*Serious, uneasy, almost frightened.*] Aunt Ruth —

[*She stops.*

RUTH. What, dear?

BLANCHE. Nothing.

[*She gives* STERLING *a searching, steady look and keeps her eyes upon him, trying to read his real self.*

RUTH. [*Continues to* STERLING.] Mr. Mason is coming to me in the morning, and if you will lunch with me at one, I will then be able to give all the papers over to you.

[STERLING, *who up to this time has been almost dumbfounded by this sudden good fortune, now collects himself, and speaks delightedly but with sufficient reserve of his feelings.* BLANCHE *does not take her eyes from* STERLING'S *face.*

STERLING. Aunt Ruth, I thank you from the bottom of my heart, and I will do my best.

BLANCHE. [*Quickly.*] Promise her, Dick, before

me — give her your word of honor — you will be faithful to Aunt Ruth's trust.

[*He answers* BLANCHE'S *look steadily with a hard gaze of his own.*

RUTH. His acceptance of my trust is equal to that, Blanche.

BLANCHE. It is of course, isn't it, Dick?

STERLING. Of course.

[BLANCHE *is not content, but has to satisfy herself with this.*

RUTH. To-morrow at one, then.

[*She starts to go.*

[JORDAN *enters Left.*

JORDAN. Mr. Warden.

RUTH. I can't wait. Good-by.

[*She goes out Left*

BLANCHE. We will see Mr. Warden.

JORDAN. Yes, madam.

[*He goes out Left.*

STERLING. Blanche, go to your mother and ask her to see Ned to thank him. I want a minute's talk with him if you don't mind.

BLANCHE. [*Pathetically.*] What difference does it make, Dick, if I *do* mind?

STERLING. Don't say that, old girl, and don't think it.

BLANCHE. Dick, you *are* honest, aren't you?

STERLING. [*Without flinching.*] What a question, Blanche!

[JORDAN *enters Left announcing "Mr. Warden."* WARDEN *enters, and* JORDAN *goes out.*

[EDWARD WARDEN, *though in reality scarcely younger than* STERLING, *looks at least ten years his junior. He is good-looking, practical, a reasoning being, and self-controlled. He is a thorough American, with the fresh and strong*

ideals of his race, and with the feeling of romance alive in the bottom of his heart.

STERLING. [*In enormous relief, greets him joyfully.*] Ned, what do you think! The greatest news going!

BLANCHE. Dick!

STERLING. Excuse me, Blanche, I forgot; but Ned will know how I can't help being glad.

[WARDEN *goes to* MRS. STERLING.

BLANCHE. [*Shaking* NED'S *hand.*] And Mr. Warden knows nothing could make me "*glad*" to-day. Thank you for all your kindness —

WARDEN. Don't thank me; it was nothing.

BLANCHE. Yes, please let me thank you all I can; it won't be half what I feel, but I want to know that you know even my silence is full of gratitude for all you've done for my mother, sisters, and me.

STERLING. Yes, we're all immensely indebted to you, Ned, old man.

BLANCHE. I will tell mother. I know she wants to see you.

[*She goes out Right.*

STERLING. [*Speaking with suppressed excitement and uncontrollable gladness, unable to keep it back any longer.*] Ned, my wife's aunt, Miss Hunter, has put all her business in my hands.

WARDEN. Made you her agent?

STERLING. Yes! What a godsend! Hunter didn't leave a cent.

[*A moment's pause of astonishment.*]

WARDEN. What do you mean?

STERLING. It seems he's been losing for a long time. Everything he had he lost in the copper crash.

WARDEN. But this is awful! What will Mrs. Hunter and her two young daughters do?

STERLING. I don't know. I hadn't thought of that.

WARDEN. You'll have to think of it.

STERLING. I?

WARDEN. Of course you'll have to help them.

STERLING. I can't! Look here, I didn't tell you the truth about my affairs last week, when I struck you for that loan.

WARDEN. You don't mean to say you weren't straight with me?

STERLING. Oh, I only didn't want to frighten you till I'd got the money; if you had made me the loan, I'd have owned up afterwards all right enough.

WARDEN. Owned up what?

STERLING. That I told you a pack of lies

— that I haven't any security! — that I haven't anything but *debts*.

WARDEN. [*Strongly.*] Good things to borrow on! Look here, Dick, how long have we been friends?

STERLING. Since that day at boarding school when you took a licking for something *I* did.

WARDEN. What I mean is we were pals at school, chums at college, stanch friends for twenty years.

STERLING. Hell! Are we as old as all that?

WARDEN. Inseparable friends till the last two years.

[STERLING'S *eyes shift.*

STERLING. I've been overworked lately, and everything has gone wrong!

WARDEN. [*Comes up to him, and speaks firmly but still friendly.*] You *yourself* have *gone wrong!*

STERLING. [*On the defensive.*] What do you mean?

WARDEN. Why did you take your business out of my hands?

STERLING. The law didn't pay me enough. I thought I'd try a little amateur stockbroking.

[*Smiling insincerely.*

WARDEN. You didn't want *me to know* what you were doing!

STERLING. Rats!

WARDEN. You didn't want me to know what funds — *whose* funds — you were using — *mis*using.

STERLING. [*Ugly.*] What!

WARDEN. Whose money you were gambling with!

STERLING. Have you been spying on me?

WARDEN. Your *wife's* money!

STERLING. Well, she's *my* wife, and you don't know what you're talking about!

[*He turns from him and picks up a book from the table upside down and pretends to read it.*

WARDEN. You stole from me once when you were a boy!

STERLING. No! I didn't!

[*Throwing the book down.*

WARDEN. You lie! Do you hear me? *You lie!* [*He waits a second.* STERLING *does nothing.*] I was never sure till to-day! I fought against ever thinking it, believing my suspicions were an injustice to you, but little things were always disappearing out of my rooms — finally, even money. Lately, that old suspicion has come back with a fuller force, and to-day it became a certainty.

STERLING. How to-day?

WARDEN. Because if it weren't true, you'd have knocked me down just now when I called you first a thief and *twice* a liar!

[*He stands squarely facing him.* STERLING *stands facing him also, surprised, taken off his guard.*

STERLING. Oh, come, you're joking! [WARDEN *makes an angry exclamation.*] Why're you telling me all this now?

WARDEN. Because I want you to be careful. I want you to know some one is watching you! Some one who knows what you've come to! Some one who knows you can't resist temptation! Some one who knows money not yours *has* stuck to your fingers!

STERLING. You mind your own business.

WARDEN. I'll mind *yours* if it's necessary to protect people who are dear to me!

[STERLING *looks at him with a sudden suspicion.*

STERLING. [*Insinuatingly.*] I didn't know you were particularly attached to Mrs. Hunter.

WARDEN. I'm not.

STERLING. Or to her two unmarried daughters!

WARDEN. Nor am I!

STERLING. [*With whispered intensity.*] By God, if you are in love with my wife!

WARDEN. If you thought that out loud, I'd knock you down!

STERLING. Huh! you talk as if you thought I were a coward!

WARDEN. No, not a *physical* coward — I've seen you do too many plucky things — but a *moral* coward — yes, you are one!

[*Straight to him, standing close and looking him squarely in the eyes.*

STERLING. [*Wavering.*] Oh, you're too damned preachy!

[MRS. HUNTER *enters Right with* CLARA. MRS. HUNTER *shakes hands with* WARDEN *silently, happy in the feeling that she is in great afflic-*

tion, and satisfied with the appearance and impression she is making. She carries her handkerchief, with its black border, ready in her hand. CLARA *has silently shaken hands with* WARDEN, *after her mother. She afterwards goes to* STERLING *and hands him several of the letters of condolence. She then goes to the window at Left, pulling aside the curtain, and stands looking out, rather bored, wishing she could go out and take a walk.*

MRS. HUNTER. We will never forget your kindness. Will the evening papers have anything in, do you think?

WARDEN. No, not before morning.

MRS. HUNTER. [*Sighs.*] Every one was there.

STERLING. Where's Blanche?

MRS. HUNTER. Upstairs. She said she was going after Aunt Ruth.

STERLING. [*Frightened.*] After Aunt Ruth? [*Strongly.*] What for?

MRS. HUNTER. I don't know. [*Whimpering.*] I'm not considered in the family any longer!

STERLING. I shall stop and take her home.

[JORDAN *enters.*

JORDAN. Will you see visitors, madam?

STERLING. No.

[*He goes out Right.*

MRS. HUNTER. "No"? Yes, we will! I need to see some one, or I shall break down. Go upstairs, Clara!

CLARA. No, *why* need I?

MRS. HUNTER. You're not out yet.

CLARA. I don't care! At this rate I'll never get "out." Who are they, Jordan?

JORDAN. Miss Sillerton, Miss Godesby, and Mr. Trotter, miss.

WARDEN. I must go, Mrs. Hunter.

MRS. HUNTER. [*Relieved.*] So sorry. Could you go straight to Mr. Mason? He wishes to see you?

[*Shaking hands.*

WARDEN. Certainly.

MRS. HUNTER. Thank you.

[WARDEN *inclines his head to* CLARA.

CLARA. [*Lightly.*] Good-by!

[WARDEN *goes out Left.*

MRS. HUNTER. I don't think we ought to receive Mr. Trotter.

CLARA. Pshaw! why not? If there's really any idea of my mar—

[*She stops short, silenced by a look from her mother and an indication toward* JORDAN.

MRS. HUNTER. Show them up, Jordan. [JORDAN *bows and goes out.*] How do I look, dear?

[*Arranges her handkerchief.*

CLARA. [*Looking in the mirror.*] How do I?

MRS. HUNTER. [*With her back to* CLARA.] I asked you first how *I* looked!

CLARA. [*Not observing.*] Oh, you're all right; how am I?

MRS. HUNTER. [*Not looking at* CLARA.] Charming! We'll go upstairs and come down again; I don't think it nice to be found here as if we were expecting visitors.

[*They go out Right.*

[JORDAN *steps into the room to announce the visitors, and seeing no one there, bows as the three pass him.*

JORDAN. The ladies will be down at once.

[*He goes out Right.*

[*The three turn, looking about the room with curiosity, as if the funeral might have made some difference in the house.*

[MISS SILLERTON *is a handsome, attractive woman, most fashionably dressed and perfectly conventional in character and intelligence.* MISS GODESBY *is a little slow, more assertive, sharper of tongue, more acutely intelligent, and equally smartly dressed. She has still a remnant of real, sincere feeling buried under a cynical mask which her life in a fast set has developed for her self-preservation.* TROTTER *is a foolish young person, meaning well enough according to his lights, which are not of the biggest and brightest.*

TROTTER. Classy house altogether!

MISS SILLERTON. Mrs. Hunter went to the

most expensive decorator in town, and told him, no matter what it cost, to go ahead and do his *worst!*

[*They all laugh and seat themselves comfortably.*

TROTTER. Say! The youngest daughter is a good looker — very classy.

MISS SILLERTON. That's the one we told you about, the one we want you to marry.

MISS GODESBY. Yes, with your money and her cleverness, she'll rubber neck you into the smartest push in town!

TROTTER. You've promised I shall know the whole classy lot before spring.

MISS GODESBY. So you will if you do as we tell you. But you mustn't let society see that you *know* you're getting in; nothing pleases society so much as to think you're a blatant idiot. It makes everybody feel you're their equal — that's why you get in.

TROTTER. I've got a coach and can drive four-in-hand. I've an automobile drag, and the biggest private yacht in the world building. I'm going to have the most expensive house in Long Island, where the oysters come from, and I've bought a lot in Newport twice as big as the swellest fellow's there. I've got a house in London and a flat in Paris, and I make money fly. I think I ought to be a cinch as a classy success.

MISS GODESBY. Don't be a yap; flag Clara Hunter and you're all right!

MISS SILLERTON. Her father's position was the best in this country!

TROTTER. But he's dead.

[*Sitting.*

MISS GODESBY. A good thing for you, for he would never have stood for you!

TROTTER. He'd have had to — or do without

me as a son-in-law — I wouldn't marry the Venus of Milo if her father didn't think I was good enough. I'm no Dodo bird!

MISS GODESBY. It's up to you now, Trotter! Go in and win.

[*Enter* TOMPSON *Right; a decided change takes place in all their manners.*

TOMPSON. Madam will be down at once, miss.

MISS SILLERTON. Thank you.

[TOMPSON *goes out Right.*

MISS GODESBY. Only stay a minute or two, Trotty — we're doing our best for you, but we must look out for ourselves, too, and we've come here to-day on business.

MISS SILLERTON. How'll we ever get the subject on to clothes?

MISS GODESBY. Humph! Do you think you

can talk five minutes with Mrs. Hunter and not hit that topic? It's a bull's eye!

TROTTER. I don't see where I'm going to come into this classy conversation.

MISS GODESBY. You see, Trotty, they brought over piles of clothes from Europe this year, and we want to get hold of them before any one else has a chance — get 'em cheap before they have an idea anybody else'll buy them.

TROTTER. Who buy what?

MISS SILLERTON. *We* — buy their winter clothes.

TROTTER. For Heaven's sake!

MISS GODESBY. Laugh, you silly! I heard the Reed girls planning to come to-morrow. They didn't dare come to-day. Those girls haven't any sand! They're always getting left.

TROTTER. You two *are* Dodo birds!

MISS GODESBY. I say, Eleanor, you're such a lobster about prices and Mrs. Hunter's no idiot, we'd better agree on some sort of a signal! Listen! if you like a gown very much, ask the price, then say to me, "My dear, your hat pin is coming out." And if I think it's a bargain, I'll say, "So it is, thank you ; won't you put it in for me?" And if I think Mrs. Hunter's trying to stick you, I'll say "No, it isn't ; it's always like that."

MISS SILLERTON. All right.

[MRS. HUNTER *and* CLARA *enter Right. The manner of* MISS SILLERTON *and* MISS GODESBY *changes immediately. They speak with rather subdued voices, in the tone of conventional sympathy which is usually adopted on such occasions.* MRS. HUNTER *also assumes the manner of a martyr to grief.* CLARA *is casual and hard.*

MISS SILLERTON. [*Shakes hands with* MRS. HUNTER.] Dear Mrs. Hunter.

[*She kisses her.*

Clara, dear.

[*She kisses her.*

[MISS GODESBY *goes to* MRS. HUNTER *and shakes hands while* MISS SILLERTON *crosses to* CLARA; *Trotter shakes hands with* MRS. HUNTER *as* MISS GODESBY *goes to* CLARA.

TROTTER. I hope you don't think my coming an intrusion.

MRS. HUNTER. Not at all.

MISS GODESBY. I felt we must stop in for a few minutes to give you our love and sympathy and find out how you are.

MRS. HUNTER. I've been through a terrible strain. My loss is even greater than I could ever possibly imagine.

CLARA. [*Who misinterprets her mother's remark.*] Yes, indeed, I should say it was!

[MRS. HUNTER *stops her with a warning look.*

MRS. HUNTER. But every one has been most kind. *Lady Hopeton* sent me a beautiful long letter to-day.

MISS GODESBY. And I'm glad to find you looking so well. Black *suits* you!

[*She exchanges a knowing glance with* MISS SILLERTON.

MRS. HUNTER. Oh, I don't know, Julia; I've always thought black very *trying* for me.

MISS GODESBY. Oh, *no! every one's* saying *just* the reverse!

MRS. HUNTER. But — I suppose clothes don't interest you, Mr. Trotter?

TROTTER. Oh, yes, they do, out of sight!

CLARA. Well, I wish you could have seen the beautiful things we brought over with us!

MISS SILLERTON. Julia and I were just speaking about it, and pitying you from the bottom of our hearts.

[MISS SILLERTON *and* MISS GODESBY *again exchange surreptitious glances.*

MRS. HUNTER. Every one's been most kind. [*There is an awkward pause for a moment, no one knowing quite what to say. Both* MISS GODESBY *and* MISS SILLERTON *have started the conversation in the direction of clothing and are fearful of the topic being changed. As the pause becomes embarrassing, they look helplessly from one to the other, and all five, suddenly and at once, make an ineffectual effort to say something — or nothing. Out of the general confusion* MRS. HUNTER *comes to the front, mistress of the situation.*] Are

you going to stay in New York this winter, Mr. Trotter?

TROTTER. Yes, I'm negotiating for one of the biggest classy building plots on upper Fifth Avenue.

CLARA. [*To* MISS GODESBY.] I saw in the papers you were at the dance last night.

[MISS GODESBY *nods and motions surreptitiously to* TROTTER *to go. He, however, doesn't understand.*

MRS. HUNTER. [*With interest again in life.*] Oh, *were you?* What did you wear?

MISS GODESBY. Oh, dowdy old things. I haven't bought my winter frocks yet.

[*She repeats this casually as if to herself.*

[MISS SILLERTON *motions to* TROTTER *to go, but he has forgotten and still doesn't understand.*

TROTTER. What?

MISS GODESBY. You warned us not to let you forget your engagement!

TROTTER. What engagement?

MISS SILLERTON. How do we know! we only know you said you *had* to go!

TROTTER. Never said so! Oh! [*As it dawns upon him.*] Oh, yes! of course. [*He rises.*] Very sorry — must be off. Only dropped in — er — that is, came in to express my respectful sympathy.

[*Shaking hands with* MRS. HUNTER.

MRS. HUNTER. [*Who rises.*] I hope you will come and see us again.

CLARA. Do! It'll be a godsend! We'll be dull as ditchwater here this winter!

TROTTER. I shall be delighted to call again. Good-by. [*He bows to Clara. In his embarrassment he starts to shake hands all over again, but,*

realizing his mistake, laughs nervously.] Oh, I have already.

MISS SILLERTON. Good-by, Trotter.

MISS GODESBY. Don't forget we're booked with you at Sherry's.

TROTTER. Whose treat?

MISS GODESBY. Oh! *Yours*, of course —

TROTTER. I say, why can't I stay? I won't interfere.

MRS. HUNTER. Oh, do stay, Mr. Trotter!

MISS GODESBY. Oh, do stay!

[*Suggesting by her tone that he mustn't dare to remain.*

CLARA. Good!

[TROTTER *remains, and they all settle themselves again for a long stay.*

MRS. HUNTER. By the way, you were speaking just now of your winter frocks. It occurs to me —

of course I don't know as I really want to dispose of them, but — er —

[*She hesitates purposely.*

MISS GODESBY. Oh, *would* you? [*Rising, she takes a chair nearer to* MRS. HUNTER.] You *dear* thing!

MRS. HUNTER. The dresses are no use to us now, and when *we're* out of mourning — *they'll* be out of style. You could wear Jess' things perfectly, Julia.

MISS SILLERTON. And even something of yours could be made over for us.

MRS. HUNTER. But I'm so much older than you!

MISS SILLERTON. [*Thoughtlessly.*] Yes, but you never dress appropriately to your age.

CLARA. [*Laughing delightedly.*] That's pretty good!

MISS SILLERTON. [*Saves herself.*] You know what I mean, you always *look* so *youthful*, you *can't* dress any older.

MRS. HUNTER. [*Rising.*] Clara, dear, go upstairs and have Tompson bring down my Worth dress and Jess' Doucet and your Paquin. [*She goes with* CLARA *to the door, Right, and then whispers to her.*] If you remember, don't tell what we paid — we ought to get nearly double out of these girls — and warn Tompson not to be surprised at anything she hears.

[MISS GODESBY *and* MISS SILLERTON *exchange glances.* CLARA *goes out Right.*

MRS. HUNTER. It seems as if I had no further interest in clothes, anyway.

MISS GODESBY. Don't say that. Every one I've seen this afternoon is wildly enthusiastic over your mourning.

MRS. HUNTER. Well, I went straight to Madame O'Hoolihan and gave her carte blank!

MISS GODESBY. I wouldn't like to be the ice man when your bill comes in! — and clothes abroad are so much cheaper.

MRS. HUNTER. [*Thoughtlessly.*] Oh, *half!*

MISS GODESBY. [*Quickly.*] You see you'll be doing us a really great favor letting us have some of your things!

MRS. HUNTER. [*Realizing her nearly fatal error.*] Oh! Oh, yes — but — er — I must say that *we* found prices while in Paris *this year* rather *atrocious!*

[CLARA *reënters Right.*

CLARA. [*Sighs.*] O dear! It breaks my heart not to wear my ball dress, my dear Julia; it was designed specially for me. I told Marie to put it on, mama; my clothes fit her perfectly,

and I thought it would show so much better what it is.

MRS. HUNTER. Here they are.

[*Rises as* TOMPSON *enters Right.*

TOMPSON. Mrs. Hunter's reception gown.

[*Displaying it.*

CLARA. Oh, this *is* a beauty!

[*She takes the costume and drapes it over a chair.* MISS GODESBY *and* MISS SILLERTON *come closer to examine.*

MRS. HUNTER. Tompson. — [*Taking her to one side, whispers.*] — I forget; do you remember what I paid for this dress?

TOMPSON. [*Whispers back.*] One hundred and sixty dollars, madam.

MRS. HUNTER. Oh, yes. Don't say anything. [*Returning to the others.*] Do you like it?

MISS SILLERTON. Perfectly lovely!
MISS GODESBY. Immensely. It's great! } [*At the same time.*

MRS. HUNTER. [*Hesitates.*] I forget just what I paid for it, but I believe it was two hundred dollars.

[CLARA *half exclaims in astonishment, but on being pinched surreptitiously on the arm by* MRS. HUNTER *she grasps the situation and starts in to do her share.*

CLARA. Oh, no, mama! I'm sure it was more than that!

MRS. HUNTER. Well, perhaps it was two — twenty or two — twenty-five.

TROTTER. That's cheap, isn't it?

MISS GODESBY. Shut up.

[TOMPSON'S *face is always a perfect blank, showing no expression or surprise; she has lived with* MRS. HUNTER *for many years and "knows her business."*

MISS GODESBY. [*In a very different tone of voice, influenced by the big price.*] Of course, I see it's made of the best material. But it isn't my color.

MRS. HUNTER. It's the very latest shade.

MISS GODESBY. Yes, I know; but I think as you said a little while ago, perhaps it is a trifle too old for me.

MRS. HUNTER. I might let you have it for a little less; say one hundred and eighty.

MISS GODESBY. Thank you very much. I'll think it over.

MISS SILLERTON. What's the other?

CLARA. This is a dinner dress of Jess'.

[*Holding it up to her own waist.*

MISS SILLERTON. [*Carried away by the dress.*] Oh, lovely, — perfectly charming, — an adorable gown!

[MISS GODESBY *pulls her arm and tries to make her less enthusiastic.*

MISS GODESBY. [*To* CLARA *and* MRS. HUNTER.] Excuse me.

[*She takes* MISS SILLERTON *to one side and whispers in her ear.*

MISS SILLERTON. [*Aloud.*] I can't help it. I'm crazy about the dress!

[*Meanwhile* MRS. HUNTER *and* TOMPSON *have whispered together.*

MRS. HUNTER. They said themselves this was the most successful frock they turned out this autumn.

MISS SILLERTON. And how much is *this* one?

MRS. HUNTER. [*Very quickly, trying not to speak consciously.*] This was two hundred and seventy-five.

[CLARA *bites her lips in surprise and winks*

visibly to TOMPSON, *who gives no sign and is otherwise imperturbable.*

MISS SILLERTON. [*To* MISS GODESBY, *looking hard at her.*] My dear, your hat pin is coming out!

MISS GODESBY. [*Looking hard at her.*] No, it isn't; it's always like that.

MISS SILLERTON. [*Going closer to her, whispers.*] Which does that mean? I forget!

MISS GODESBY. It's a *gouge!*

MISS SILLERTON. I can't help it; I can't resist.

MRS. HUNTER. [*Whispers to* CLARA.] She's going to take it; I wish I'd asked more.

MISS SILLERTON. Mrs. Hunter, I'll *take* the dinner dress! I'm crazy about it!

MRS. HUNTER. I'm glad to have you have it; I'm glad to be able to do you, in a way, a favor.

[MARIE *at this moment enters dressed in the*

most exquisite ball dress of the very latest fashion and looks extremely lovely.

CLARA. Here's mine! I could cry to think I'll never wear it!

MARIE. *Voila*, madame!

[*A short silence, while the women sit down and drink in the gown.*

MISS SILLERTON. [*In a subdued voice of awed admiration.*] Beautiful!

MISS GODESBY. Great!

TROTTER. [*To* MISS GODESBY.] *I'm* stuck on the *girl;* introduce me! She's out of sight!

[MRS. HUNTER *sighs long and loud, — a sigh of appreciation and admiration.* MARIE *stands in the centre of the stage facing the audience.*

MISS GODESBY. May we see her back?

CLARA. Her *entire* back, if she turns around!

MRS. HUNTER. Turn around, Marie.

MARIE. *Oui*, madame.

[*She turns her back — the dress is cut extremely in the back.*

MISS SILLERTON. Oh!

MISS GODESBY. Rather!

MRS. HUNTER. The way everything is made this year.

MISS GODESBY. I'm afraid my back is rather full of bones.

CLARA. They told us in Paris, bones were coming in! [*She takes a large American beauty rose from a vase on the piano and slips it down* MARIE'S *back so that the dress seems much less décolleté.*] There, never too late to mend!

MISS GODESBY. How much is this one?

[MISS GODESBY *and* MISS SILLERTON *examine the dress.*

CLARA. [*Whispers to* MRS. HUNTER.] You paid two hundred for it!

MRS. HUNTER. Three hundred dollars. It is really superb.

MISS SILLERTON. [*Pulling* MISS GODESBY *around quickly.*] My dear, your hat pin is coming out!

MISS GODESBY. Don't be absurd!

MISS SILLERTON. What?

MISS GODESBY. It's my turn, sit down; you got the last! You won't mind my being frank, Mrs. Hunter?

MRS. HUNTER. [*On the defensive.*] Certainly not.

MISS GODESBY. I think the price is too much.

TROTTER. Oh, go on, pay it!

MISS GODESBY. Will you sign the check?

TROTTER. *Excuse me!*

CLARA. I'd give twice that if only I could wear it to one ball this winter!

MRS. HUNTER. I wouldn't part with it for a penny less. I couldn't afford to.

[*The manners and voices of all become a little strained.*

MISS GODESBY. That is of course your affair.

MRS. HUNTER. [*Politely.*] We needn't keep Marie any longer, at any rate, need we? You can go, Marie, and you too, Tompson.

[CLARA *and* MRS. HUNTER *help place the other dresses on* TOMPSON'S *arms.*

MISS SILLERTON. [*To* MISS GODESBY, *on the opposite side of the room, in a lowered voice.*] I'll take it; I'm willing to pay that.

MISS GODESBY. Don't you dare interfere! I want the gown, but I know she'll come down, — if she doesn't, I'll make a bluff at going. Then

if she sticks to her price, I'll come back and pay it.

[*They turn to* MRS. HUNTER.

MISS SILLERTON. Oh, Mrs. Hunter, may I see my dress just one more minute?

MRS. HUNTER. Certainly.

[*She and* CLARA *come back with the dress.*

MARIE. [*To* TOMPSON *by the door at Right.*] *Vite!* Come! Come! Jordan 'ave stole ze photograph machine of Mees Clara, and he make now one pigsher of me in ze dress!

[*Smiling mischievously, delighted, she goes out Right.*

MISS SILLERTON. Thank you.

[*She leaves her dress.*

MRS. HUNTER. Take this too, Tompson.

TOMPSON. Yes, madam.

[MRS. HUNTER *speaks to* TOMPSON, *aside, and*

CLARA, *near them, watches the two visitors out of the corner of her eye.*

MISS GODESBY. [*Aside to* MISS SILLERTON.] I'll leave my muff; that'll be a good excuse to come back.

TROTTER. [*Also in a lowered voice to* MISS GODESBY.] Dodo!

[TOMPSON *goes out Right.*

[MRS. HUNTER *and* CLARA *come back.*

MISS GODESBY. You really couldn't take less than three hundred?

MRS. HUNTER. I wish I could if only for your own sake; but I really couldn't in justice to myself.

MISS GODESBY. I'm very sorry — and I'm afraid we must be going now.

MRS. HUNTER. [*Not believing they will go.*] Oh, must you? Well, it was very kind of you to come.

[MISS GODESBY *leaves her muff upon the table at the Left.*

MISS SILLERTON. [*Shakes hands with* MRS. HUNTER.] Good-by.

[*She goes on to* CLARA.

[MISS GODESBY *comes to shake hands with* MRS. HUNTER.

MRS. HUNTER. I think you're making a mistake not to take the dress, Julia dear.

MISS GODESBY. Perhaps, but I really can't go more than two hundred and fifty.

[MRS. HUNTER *looks surreptitiously at* CLARA, *who slyly shakes her head to her mother.*

MRS. HUNTER. Oh, quite impossible!

MISS GODESBY. Good-by.

MRS. HUNTER. Good-by.

MISS GODESBY. Good-by, Clara.

MRS. HUNTER. [*Frightened.*] Would you like to see the dress off?

MISS GODESBY. Oh, my dear, it was as *off* as I would ever like to see it. Good-by.

MRS. HUNTER. Good-by. [MISS SILLERTON *and* MISS GODESBY *get to doorway Left.*] You *won't* take it?

MISS GODESBY. *Can't!* Good-by.

CLARA. [*Dryly.*] You're forgetting your muff!

TROTTER. Rubber!

MISS GODESBY. [*Coming back for it.*] How stupid!

[*She goes away to the door again in silence, which is full of suspense for all of them. As she reaches the door* MRS. HUNTER *speaks.*

MRS. HUNTER. Look here, Julia, don't say another word; you shall have the dress for two hundred and fifty.

MISS GODESBY. [*Rushing back, followed by all the others.*] You dear! I'm afraid you think I've been rather nasty!

MRS. HUNTER. Oh, no, of course business is business, and I'd *rather you* had it than see it wasted on some of our other friends who'd be sights in it!

MISS SILLERTON. Good-by. [*Kisses her this time.*] I haven't said half I feel; you've been in my thoughts all these last few days.

MRS. HUNTER. Thank you, dear.

[*Kisses her.*

MISS GODESBY. Shall we send around for the dresses in the morning?

MRS. HUNTER. Or I'll send them.

MISS GODESBY. No, we won't trouble you.

MISS SILLERTON. Good-by!

MRS. HUNTER AND CLARA. Good-by!

[MISS SILLERTON *and* MISS GODESBY *go out Left, followed by* TROTTER, *who has joined in all the good-bys, and upon whom* CLARA *has more or less continuously kept her "weather eye."*

MRS. HUNTER. I'm perfectly sure if I'd stuck to three hundred, Julia Godesby would have sent around when she got home and paid it!

CLARA. I'm glad you didn't run the risk though, for we'll need every cent we can get now.

[*She runs her fingers rapidly over the piano keys.*

[BLANCHE *reënters Right.*

MRS. HUNTER. Why, I thought you'd gone long ago.

BLANCHE. Jess begged me to stay with her. Try to understand her, mother; I think she will miss father more than any of us.

[JORDAN *enters Left.*

JORDAN. Mr. Warden has come back, madam.

[WARDEN *enters Left.*

WARDEN. Forgive my intruding so soon again, but did Mr. Mason leave a letter case of Mr. Hunter's here?

[BLANCHE *begins looking for the case.*

MRS. HUNTER. I haven't seen it; I'll ask the servants to look. Excuse me, I'm quite tired out; we've been receiving a long visit of condolence.

[*She goes out, Right, with* CLARA, *who links her arm in her mother's.*

BLANCHE. [*Finding the case, which has fallen beneath the table.*] Here it is. Dear old pocket-book —

[*Her voice breaks on the last word, and turning her face away to hide her tears, she hands him the well-worn letter case.*

WARDEN. Mrs. Sterling, I'm glad they left us

alone, because Mr. Mason said he hadn't been able to manage it — to see you alone — and yet he wanted *you only* to examine these. They are private papers of Mr. Hunter; he thought they ought not to be destroyed without being read, and yet *he* hesitated to read them. We thought that duty devolved best upon *you.* [*He hands back the letter case.*] Shall I wait and take back the case to Mr. Mason with the papers you wish him to have?

BLANCHE. Oh, no, I will send them; I mustn't keep you while I read them. I'm always taking more of your time than I ought.

WARDEN. [*Speaks with sincerity, but without any suggestion of love-making.*] But never as much as I want to give you! Don't forget, Mrs. Sterling, what you promised me at your wedding, — that your husband's best man should be your best friend.

BLANCHE. And nobody knows what it means to a woman, even a happily married woman like me — [*This is spoken with a slight effort, as if she is persuading herself that she is a happily married woman.*] — to have an honest friend like you. It's those people who have failed that say there is no such thing as a platonic friendship.

WARDEN. We'll prove them wrong.

BLANCHE. We will. Good-by, and thank you.

WARDEN. And thank *you!* [*Starting to go, he turns.*] Shall I bring that Russian pianist around to play for you some day next week?

BLANCHE. Do — I want some music.

WARDEN. Only let me know what day. [*He goes out Left.* BLANCHE *sits by the table and opens the case. She looks first at a memoranda and reads what is on the outside.*] A business memoranda. Lists of bonds. [*She opens and looks at*

the next paper only a second, and then closes it.] This, Mr. Mason will understand better than I. [*She puts it back in the pocket case. She finds a photograph in the case.*] My picture!—[*She looks for others, but finds none.*]—and *only* mine! Oh, father! . . . [*She wipes away tears from her eyes so as to see the picture, which is an old one.*] Father, I returned *your* love. [*She reads on the back of photograph.*] "Blanche, my darling daughter, at fourteen years of age!" That's mine! that's my own! [*And she puts the picture away separately. She takes up a small packet of very old love-letters tied with faded old pink tape.*] Old letters from mother; they must be her love-letters. She shall have them,—they may soften her. [*She takes up a slip of paper and reads on the outside.*] This is something for Mason, too. [*She puts it back in the case. She takes up a sealed envelope,*

blank.] Nothing on it, and sealed. [*She looks at it a moment, thinking.*] Father, did you want this opened? If you didn't, why not have destroyed it? Ah! I needn't be afraid; *you* had nothing to hide from the world. [*Tearing it open, she reads.*] "I have discovered my son-in-law, Richard Sterling, in irregular business dealing. He is not honest. I will watch him as long as I live; but when you read this, Mason, keep your eye upon him for my daughter's sake. He has been warned by me — he may never trip again, and her happiness lies in ignorance." [*She starts, and looks about her to make sure she is alone. She then sits staring ahead for a few seconds; then she speaks.*] My boy's father dishonest! Disgrace — he owned it — threatening *my* boy! It mustn't come! It mustn't! *I'll* watch now. [*She goes to the fireplace, tearing the paper as she crosses the room,*

she burns the letter; then she gathers up the other letters and the pocket case.] He must give me his word of honor over Richard's little bed to-night that he will do nothing to ever make the boy ashamed of bearing his father's name!

[*She watches to see that every piece of the paper burns, as*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT II

Christmas Eve; fourteen months later; the dining room of the Hunters' house, which is now lived in jointly by the STERLINGS *and* MRS. HUNTER *and her daughters. It is a dark wainscoted room, with curtains of crimson brocade. It is decorated with laurel roping, mistletoe, and holly, for Christmas. It is the end of a successful dinner party, fourteen happy and more or less congenial persons being seated at a table, as follows*: WARDEN, RUTH, MASON, CLARA, TROTTER, MRS. HUNTER, BLANCHE, STERLING, MISS SILLERTON, MR. GODESBY, JESSICA, DOCTOR STEINHART, *and* MISS GODESBY. *The*

room is dark on all sides, only a subdued light being shed on the table by two large, full candelabra with red shaded candles. As the curtain rises the bare backs of the three women nearest the footlights gleam out white. Candied fruit and other sweetmeats are being passed by four men servants, including JORDAN *and* LEONARD.

RUTH. My dear Blanche, what delicious candy!

MISS SILLERTON. Isn't it!

MISS GODESBY. Half of the candy offered one nowadays seems made of *papier-mâché.*

MRS. HUNTER. [*To* MISS GODESBY.] Julia, do tell me how Mr. Tomlins takes his wife's divorce?

MISS GODESBY. He takes it with a grain of salt!

MRS. HUNTER. But isn't he going to bring a counter suit?

STERLING. No.

RUTH. I hope not. I am an old-fashioned woman and don't believe in divorce!

MISS GODESBY. Really! But then you're not married!

MISS SILLERTON. What is the reason for so much divorce nowadays?

RUTH. Marriage is the principal one.

BLANCHE. *I* don't believe in divorce, either.

MISS SILLERTON. My dear, no woman married to as handsome a man as Mr. Sterling would.

TROTTER. You people are all out of date! More people get divorced nowadays than get married.

BLANCHE. Too many people do — that's the trouble. I meant what I said when I was married — "for better, for worse, till death us do part." — What is the opera Monday?

TROTTER. Something of Wagner's. He's a Dodo bird! Bores me to death! Not catchy enough music for me.

MRS. HUNTER. You'd adore him if you went to Bayreuth. Which was that opera, Clara, we heard at Bayreuth last summer? Was it *Faust* or *Lohengrin!* They play those two so much here I'm always getting them mixed!

MISS SILLERTON. Wagner didn't write *Faust!*

MRS. HUNTER. Didn't he? I thought he had; he's written so many operas the last few seasons!

CLARA. I like *Tannhäuser*, because as soon as you hear the "twinkle, twinkle, little stars" song, you can cheer up and think of your wraps and fur boots.

TROTTER. My favorite operas are *San Toy* and the *Roger Brothers*, though I saw *Florodora* thirty-six times!

BLANCHE. Mother would have gone with you every one of those thirty-six *Florodora* times. She's not really fond of music.

MRS. HUNTER. Not fond of music! Didn't I have an opera box for four years?

TROTTER. Why doesn't Conried make some arrangement with Weber and Fields and introduce their chorus into *Faust* and *Carmen?*

DR. STEINHART. Great idea! [*To* MISS GODESBY.] Did you get a lot of jolly presents?

MISS GODESBY. Not half bad, especially two fine French bulls!

[*All are laughing and talking together.*

BLANCHE. What did you get, Mr. Warden?

WARDEN. Three copies of "David Harum," two umbrellas, and a cigar case too short for my cigars.

MISS GODESBY. Give it to me for cigarettes.

WARDEN. It's too long for cigarettes. Then I had something that's either a mouchoir or a handkerchief case, or for neckties, or shaving papers, or something or other.

TROTTER. Yes, I know, I got one of those, too.

DR. STEINHART. So did I!

BLANCHE. I must start the women; we are coming back here to arrange a surprise for you men.

[*She nods her head in signal to* STERLING, *and rises. All rise.*

STERLING. One moment please. One toast on Christmas night! Ned, give us a toast.

ALL THE WOMEN. [*But not in unison.*] Oh, yes! A toast! [*Ad lib.*]

WARDEN. [*Holding up his glass.*]

Here's to those whom we love!

And to those who love us!

And to those who love those whom we love

And to those who love those who love us!

ALL THE MEN. [*Not in unison.*] Good! Bravo! Bully toast! [*Ad lib.*]

[*Every one drinks.*

BLANCHE. One more toast, Dick. [*To the others.*] Christmas Day is our boy's birthday.

RUTH. Surely! a toast to Richard!

STERLING. Long life to Master Sterling, the best boy in the world, and to all his good friends at this table.

THE MEN. Hear! Hear!

[*All the women speak their next speeches at the same time.*

BLANCHE. [*Laughing.*] Of course! I've dropped my handkerchief.

[NED *dives under the table for it.*

MISS SILLERTON. O dear, my fan!

MISS GODESBY. What a bore! I've dropped a glove!

[STEINHART *goes under the table for it.*

CLARA. Both my gloves gone — I'm so sorry!

[GODESBY *goes under the table for them.*

MRS. HUNTER. Dick, please, I've dropped my smelling bottle.

[TROTTER *and* STERLING *go under the table for it.*

RUTH. My gloves, please, I'm so sorry!

[MASON *goes under the table for them.*

[*The speeches of the women are simultaneous, followed by the movements of the men also, all at the same time.*

[ALL *together*]

BLANCHE. Please don't bother; the servants —

[LEONARD, JORDAN, *and two extra men start to hunt under the table, too.*

MISS GODESBY. Women ought to have everything they own fastened to them with rubber-neck elastics.

[*The men, somewhat flustered, all rise with the various articles, and offer them to their respective owners.*

[*All the women thank the men profusely, and apologize at the same time.* STERLING *takes* MRS. HUNTER *out at back, followed by all the other couples, all talking.* RUTH *and* MASON *lag behind.*

RUTH. [*To* BLANCHE, *who with* WARDEN *waits for* RUTH *and* MASON *to pass.*] I want just a minute with Mr. Mason, Blanche. [BLANCHE *and* WARDEN *pass out before her.* RUTH *is*

alone with MASON. *She speaks as if she were carrying on a conversation that had been interrupted. She speaks in a lowered voice, indicating the private nature of what she has to say.*] I sent him imperative word yesterday I must have the bonds. I told him I wanted one to give to his wife for Christmas. He pretends to-day he didn't receive this letter, but he must have.

MASON. This makes the third time there has been some excuse for not giving you the bonds?

RUTH. Yes, and this letter he says he didn't get was sent to his office by hand.

MASON. I'll speak to him before I leave.

[*They go out at back.*

[*As they pass out,* JORDAN *stands by the doorway holding the curtains back. The other three men stand stiffly at the Right. As* MASON *and* RUTH *go out, the* SERVANTS *relax and exchange*

glances, each giving a little laugh out loud, except JORDAN. *During the following dialogue they empty the table preparatory to arranging the room for the Christmas tree.*

JORDAN. Sh! A very dull dinner, not an interesting word spoke.

FIRST FOOTMAN. The widder seemed chipper like!

LEONARD. And did you get on to the old lady's rig-out; mourning don't hang very heavy on her shoulders.

[*One chair is moved back.*

JORDAN. [*To* FIRST FOOTMAN.] Get the coffee. [*He goes out Right. To* LEONARD.] Get the smoking lay-out!

[LEONARD *goes out Right and brings back a silver tray laden with cigarettes, cigar boxes, and a burning alcohol lamp.*

LEONARD. If you ask me, I think she's going to put a bit more on the matrimonial mare if she gets the chance.

JORDAN. It's none of your business. You're *Mrs. Sterling's* servant now.

LEONARD. Good thing, too; it was a happy day for us when *they* moved in.

FIRST FOOTMAN. [*Reënters with the coffee.*] Say, did you see how that young feller over there [*Motioning to the lower right-hand corner of the table.*] shovelled the food in?

LEONARD. And the way he poured down the liquid — regular hog! My arm's tired a-filling of his glass.

[*And he drinks a glass of champagne which has been left untouched by a guest.*

JORDAN. He ain't nobody; he hasn't any money; he was just asked to fill up. He's one of these

yere singing chaps what's asked to pass the time after dinner with a song or two *gratis*. This dinner'll last him for food for a week!

[*Their manners suddenly change as the men reënter and take seats about the two ends of the table.* STERLING, MASON, *and* DOCTOR *down Left form one group. The other men are in a group between the window and the other end. On entering* STERLING *speaks.*

STERLING. Jordan, for heaven's sake, give us something to see by! You can't tell which end of your cigar to light in this confounded woman's candle-light. If I had my way, I'd have candelabras made of Welsbachs!

TROTTER. Bright idea, Sterling.

[STERLING, *laughing, joins his group, who laugh gently with him.* JORDAN *turns on the electric light. The servants pass the*

coffee, liqueurs, and the cigars and cigarettes. Meanwhile the following dialogue takes place, the men beginning to talk at once on their entrance.

STERLING. Mr. Mason, I'd like to ask your honest opinion on something if you'll give it me.

MASON. Certainly.

STERLING. This Hudson Electric Company.

DR. STEINHART. Oh! Dropped fearfully to-day.

STERLING. But that can happen easily with the best thing. To-morrow —

MASON. [*Interrupting.*] To-morrow it will drop to its *very bottom!*

STERLING. I don't believe it.

DR. STEINHART. Surely, Mr. Mason, the men who floated that are too clever to ruin *themselves*.

MASON. They're out of it.

STERLING. Out of it!

MASON. They got out last week quietly.

STERLING. But —

MASON. Mark my words, the day after to-morrow there'll be several foolish people ruined, and *not one of the promoters of that company will lose a penny!*

STERLING. I don't believe it!

[*The crowd at the other end of the table, who have been listening to a tale from* TROTTER, *laugh heartily.*

TROTTER. [*Delighted with his success.*] I'm no Dodo bird!

[WARDEN *leaves this group casually and joins the other.*

MASON. [*To* STERLING.] Don't tell me *you're* in it?

STERLING. [*Ugly.*] Yes, I am in it!

MASON. Not *much?*

STERLING. Yes, *much!*

WARDEN. Much what?

STERLING. Oh, nothing; we were just discussing stocks.

WARDEN. And up there they're discussing Jeffreys and Fitzsimmons.

MASON. Listen, Dick, after a lifelong experience in Wall Street, I defy any broker to produce one customer who can show a profit after three consecutive years of speculation.

STERLING. Oh, you're too conservative; nothing venture, nothing have. Excuse me, I think Jeffreys and Fitzsimmons more amusing topics. Come along.

[STERLING *and* DR. STEINHART *join the other group Right.*

MASON. [*To* WARDEN.] You're Sterling's broker.

WARDEN. No, not for over a year.

MASON. Then you can't tell me how deep he is in this Hudson Electric swindle?

WARDEN. Is he in it at all?

MASON. Yes, he says, deep.

WARDEN. I suspected it yesterday.

MASON. But what with — his wife's money?

WARDEN. That went fourteen months ago. I put him on his feet then, gave him some tips that enabled him to take this house with her mother, so that with his regular law business he ought to have done very well, but his living could not leave one cent over to speculate with.

MASON. [*To himself.*] Good God!

WARDEN. I know what you're afraid of.

MASON. No!

WARDEN. Yes. The reason I'm no longer

his broker is he was ashamed to let me know about his dealings.

MASON. But you don't mean you think he'd actually *steal!*

WARDEN. His *aunt's* money? Why not? *He did his wife's!*

MASON. Does he handle any one else's affairs?

WARDEN. I know he takes care of that Godesby woman's property.

MASON. And she wouldn't hold her tongue if a crash came!

WARDEN. Not for a minute! Is Miss Hunter suspicious?

MASON. Yes. Does Sterling realize that to-morrow he will most probably be a ruined cheat?

WARDEN. Very likely.

MASON. If he made up his mind to-night it was all up with him, he might do — what?

WARDEN. Run away with whatever money he has left, or kill himself. I don't know if he's enough of a coward for that or not. There's *one* hold on him — he loves his wife.

MASON. Which will make him all the more ashamed of discovery. Do you believe she suspects?

WARDEN. Not a bit. She loves him too dearly.

MASON. Can *we* do anything?

WARDEN. Nothing but watch him closely till the people go. Then force him to make a clean breast of it, so we can all know where we stand; how we can best protect his aunt from ruin and his wife and boy from public disgrace.

MASON. He is watching us.

WARDEN. He knows I know him; we must be careful. He's coming toward us. [*He then speaks*

in a different tone, but no louder.] You're certain of the trustworthiness of your information?

MASON. Absolutely. Every man left in that concern will be ruined before the 'Change closes after to-morrow. [STERLING *has joined them in time to hear the end of* MASON'S *speech.* MASON *continues.*] I am telling Warden what I told you about the Hudson Electric Company.

STERLING. Can't you talk of something pleasanter?

[BLANCHE *reënters at back. On her entrance all the men rise. The servants finish preparing the room for the tree.*

BLANCHE. I'm very sorry — I really can't let you men stay here any longer.

ALL THE MEN. Why not? How's that? [*Ad lib.*]

BLANCHE. You know we want to get this room ready for Santa Claus! Dick! [*She goes to her husband. All the men go out at back in a group led*

by WARDEN *and* MASON. *They are all talking and laughing.* BLANCHE *is left alone with her husband.*] What is this Aunt Ruth has been telling me about not being able to get some bonds from you?

STERLING. Oh, nothing. I forgot to send them up to her, that's all.

BLANCHE. But she says she sent three times.

STERLING. One time too late to get into the vault; and the other, her letter was mislaid — I mean not given to me.

BLANCHE. You haven't broken your word to me?

STERLING. What if I had?

BLANCHE. I would let the law take its course.

STERLING. You must love me very little.

BLANCHE. I *live* with you. First you robbed me of my respect for you; then you dried up my heart with neglect.

STERLING. And our boy?

BLANCHE. Your blood runs in his veins; your shame and disgrace would be a fearful warning to him. It might kill *me;* but never mind, if it *saved him.*

STERLING. Oh, well, I haven't broken my word! So you needn't worry. I've been honest enough.

BLANCHE. [*With a long sigh of relief.*] Oh! I hope so!

MRS. HUNTER. [*Appearing in doorway at back.*] The men are in the drawing-room — shall we come *here?*

BLANCHE. Yes, we'll bring the others, mother. Come, Dick.

[*She goes out with* MRS. HUNTER *at back.*

STERLING. [*Goes to door Right, opens it, and calls.*] Leonard!

[LEONARD *enters Right.*

LEONARD. Yes, sir?

STERLING. Go up to my library at the top of the house, get a railroad guide you will find there, and bring it down and put it on the table in the hall just outside the drawing-room door.

LEONARD. Yes, sir.

STERLING. Then go to my room and pack my bag and dressing case. Do you understand?

LEONARD. Yes, sir.

[*The women are heard singing "Follow the Man from Cook's," and gradually coming nearer.*

STERLING. Be quick, and say nothing to any one.

LEONARD. Yes, sir.

[*He goes out quickly Right.* STERLING *goes up stage and stands beside the door at back as the women dance in, singing "Follow the Man from Cook's." They are led by* CLARA, *with* MRS. HUNTER *on the end.* BLANCHE *and* RUTH

follow alone, not dancing. The others dance around the chairs and CLARA *jumps on and off one of them ; this stops the rest, who balk at it.* STERLING *goes out at back. The* SERVANTS *enter Right.*

CLARA. I don't care for this dinner party at all. The women are all the time being chased away from the men! I prefer being with Mr. Trotter. Don't you, mama?

MISS SILLERTON. He doesn't seem able to give a dinner party any more without you to chaperone, Mrs. Hunter.

BLANCHE. Mother, how can you?

MRS. HUNTER. Oh, I don't know as it's *chaperoning!* I like Mr. Trotter very much.

MISS SILLERTON. But he's such a little cad. I tried to give him a lift, but he was too heavy for me.

CLARA. Oh, well, you ought just to pretend it's the money in his pocket makes him so heavy; then you'd find him dead easy.

[*Meanwhile the* SERVANTS *have arranged the table, taken out the extra leaves and made it square, and left the room. They now reënter, bringing in a gorgeously decorated and lighted Christmas tree. There is at once a loud chorus of delighted approval from the women. The* SERVANTS *place the tree in the centre of the table. The women who are sitting rise and come near to examine the tree.*

RUTH. What a beautiful tree, Blanche!

BLANCHE. The boy is to have it to-morrow morning — it's really *his* tree! [TOMPSON *brings in a large basket containing seven small stockings and six small boys' socks — very small stockings and very small socks. They are made of bright and*

different colors and are stuffed into absurd, bulgy shapes.] There's a name on each one. Come along now!

[*Taking out a little sock. The women crowd around the basket and each hangs a sock on the tree,* MISS GODESBY *and* CLARA *standing on chairs.*

CLARA. [*Reading the name on her sock.*] Oh! mine's for Mr. Mason. What's in it, Blanche?

BLANCHE. I really can't tell you. I asked the clerk where I bought it what it was for, and he said he didn't know; it was a "Christmas present."

MISS GODESBY. [*Laughing.*] Oh, I know the kind! Mine's for Howard Godesby. What's his present?

BLANCHE. A silver golf marker.

MISS GODESBY. But he doesn't play golf!

BLANCHE. Well, he ought to; it'll keep him young.

CLARA. It will be all right, anyway, Julia! *You* can give it away to some one next Christmas.

MISS SILLERTON. What's in Mr. Trotter's?

BLANCHE. Oh, that present has almost been my death! Men are so hard to find things for! I had put in a gold pencil for his key chain, but to-night while we were eating our oysters, I saw him show a beauty that his mother had given him this morning! So I whispered to Jordan between the soup and fish to change Mr. Ryder's name to Mr. Trotter's stocking, and put Mr. Trotter's name on the one that had a cigarette case in it. I sneaked a message down to Dick on my dinner card — was it all right? — and he sent back word during the game that Trotter only smoked cigars; so before the ices were passed I shuffled Mr. Trotter's and Mr. Mason's names, — I'd given Mason the cigar case, — and just as Jordan signalled to me the

transfer had been successfully effected, I heard Trotter casually observe he'd been obliged to give up smoking entirely — *doctor's orders!*

[*They laugh punctiliously, rather bored by* BLANCHE'S *long account.*

MRS. HUNTER. Isn't the tree stunning?

CLARA. [*Getting down from her chair.*] It makes the table look like one of Mr. Trotter's "informal little dinners."

MISS GODESBY. They say he has one of those men who arrange shop windows decorate his dinner table for him!

BLANCHE. The only time I ever dined with him I was really ashamed to go home with my dinner favor — it was so gorgeous! And there were such big bunches of violets in the finger bowls there wasn't room for your little finger.

MISS GODESBY. You never saw such a lot of

decoration! The game have ribbon garters on their legs, and even the raw oysters wear corsage bouquets! [*To* MRS. HUNTER.] I hope you don't mind what we're saying, Mrs. Hunter?

MRS. HUNTER. [*Offended.*] I must say I do mind very much. — [*A pause.*] — because — [*A second pause.*] — well, I am going to marry Mr. Trotter — [*All, not believing her, laugh merrily.*] You are all very rude!

MISS GODESBY. Not on the level! Not *Trotter!*

MISS SILLERTON. Not *really!*

BLANCHE. No, no, of course not!

[*She rings bell.*

MRS. HUNTER. But I *am!* And I thought here at my daughter's table, among my own friends (I was allowed to name the guests to-night), I could count on good wishes and congratulations.

[*There is a dead silence.*

[*The musicians, a band of Neapolitan players, enter and take their places in a recess at Left.*

BLANCHE. [*To the musicians.*] You may play. [*To* JORDAN, *who has brought in the Neapolitans.*] We are ready, Jordan.

[JORDAN *goes out at back.*

[RUTH *goes to* BLANCHE.

[*The guitars and mandolins begin a popular song.*

MISS GODESBY. [*To* MRS. HUNTER.] Oh, well, Mrs. Hunter, we were only codding! There's lots of good in Trotter, and I'm sure you'll bring it out. Good luck!

[*Shaking her hand.*

RUTH. [*To* BLANCHE, *aside.*] You won't allow this!

BLANCHE. Certainly not. [BLANCHE *crosses to her mother and they go to one side together;* BLANCHE *speaks in a lowered voice.*] You've amazed and

shocked me! I will not tolerate such a thing; we'll talk it over to-night.

[*She leaves her and returns to her guests,* MRS. HUNTER *standing where she is left, biting her lips and almost crying with rage and mortification.*

MISS GODESBY. [*Before the musicians, to* BLANCHE *as she joins her.*] I'm crazy about these men, Mrs. Sterling; they play so awfully well — especially that one with the lovely legs!

[JORDAN *pulls aside the curtains at back and all the men reënter except* WARDEN. *They all join hands and dance around the tree, singing with the musicians; they break, and go up to a side table, where everything to drink is displayed.* WARDEN *enters at this moment and motions to* MASON *and leads him down stage.*

WARDEN. There was a railway guide in the hall — that's what he went there for; he's *going to run away to-night.*

MASON. How'll we prevent it?

WARDEN. First, we must break up this party!

MASON. How?

WARDEN. I haven't quite thought yet. Go back to the others; send Jordan to me; don't lose sight of Dick. Jordan! [*He takes him aside.*] I want you to go out of this room for a minute, pretend to go upstairs, then come back and tell Mrs. Sterling, loud enough for the others to hear you, that Master Richard is very ill, and say the maid is frightened.

JORDAN. [*Hesitating.*] But —

WARDEN. [*Quickly and firmly.*] Do as I tell you. I am responsible for whatever happens.

[JORDAN *goes out at back. The men and women are laughing and talking about the sideboard.*

BLANCHE. Come now, everybody! Let's have the presents. Dick, you know you are to be Santa Claus.

[STERLING *looks nervously at his watch.*

STERLING. Just a minute, dear! Ned! [*Takes* WARDEN *to one side. The women move about the tree, hunting for their own names on the stockings on the table at the foot of the tree.*] Ned, I've been suddenly called out of town on business — must catch the eleven-twenty train. I don't want to break up the party, so you empty the tree, and when the time comes for me to go, I'll slip out.

WARDEN. And when your guests go?

STERLING. Oh, then you can explain for me.

[JORDAN *enters at back.*

JORDAN. [*To* BLANCHE.] Beg pardon, madam, but Master Richard is very ill.

BLANCHE. [*Alarmed.*] Richard!

JORDAN. Yes, ma'am, and Droves is very frightened, ma'am.

RUTH. Richard ill?

[*All give exclamations of surprise and regret and sympathy.*

BLANCHE. My little boy ill? Excuse me, I must go to him.

[*She hurries out at back.* RUTH *speaks to the musicians, who stop playing.*

STERLING. [*Moved.*] My boy ill — why, I can't — I can't —

WARDEN. "Can't" what?

STERLING. How can I go away?

WARDEN. Surely you won't let business take you away from your boy who may be dying.

STERLING. No! I won't go! I'll face it out! I can't leave my boy like this —

RUTH. [*Coming to* STERLING.] I'm going to take these women away; tell Blanche not to give them a thought. Their evening up to now has been charming.

[*During* RUTH'S *speech,* WARDEN *has spoken aside with* MASON.

WARDEN. [*Aside to* MASON.] Don't let Miss Hunter go.

RUTH. [*To the other guests.*] Come to the drawing-room.

MRS. HUNTER. I was crazy to see what was in my stocking.

[*All pass out talking, expressing conventional sympathy on account of* RICHARD, *but evidently resenting the breaking up of the party.* STERLING *and* WARDEN *are left alone in the*

room. STERLING *moves to go up to back;* WARDEN *interrupts him.*

WARDEN. [*To* STERLING.] Where are you going?

STERLING. To my boy and my wife.

WARDEN. Wait a minute; I want to speak to you.

STERLING. Speak to me later; I can't wait now.

BLANCHE. [*Off stage, at back, excitedly.*] Jordan! [*She enters, excited, half hysterical.*] Jordan! Where is Jordan? It was a lie! What did he mean? Richard is sleeping sweetly. The maid knows nothing of being alarmed! Where is Jordan?

[*She starts to go toward the door Right.*

WARDEN. [*Stops her.*] Mrs. Sterling, he had nothing to do with it! *I* told Jordan to say what he said.

[BLANCHE *turns and looks at* WARDEN *in astonishment.*

STERLING. [*Stunned and at once suspicious.*] What?

BLANCHE. But —

WARDEN. Forgive me for so cruelly alarming you; it was the only way I could think of for getting rid at once of your guests!

STERLING. [*Angry.*] You'll interfere once too often in the affairs of this house.

BLANCHE. [*Indignant.*] But what excuse can you make, Mr. Warden?

WARDEN. Will you be so good as to ask Miss Hunter and Mr. Mason to come here? They will explain what I have done, partly, and your husband will tell you the rest when you come back.

[STERLING *sneers aloud.*

BLANCHE. I don't understand, I don't understand.

[*She goes out at back.*

STERLING. Well, I *do* understand, at least enough.

WARDEN. Good! That spares me a very disagreeable speech.

STERLING. No, it doesn't! Come out with it! What is it you want? What is it you've found out?

WARDEN. From betraying a trust, you've come, in less than two years, to an outright embezzlement.

STERLING. Speak out — give us facts!

WARDEN. You've stolen your aunt's fortune.

STERLING. *Prove that!*

WARDEN. It's *her money* that's lost in the Hudson Electric Company!

STERLING. PROVE IT!

WARDEN. Easy enough, to-morrow.

STERLING. You've got to excuse your action *to-night* or *be kicked* out of my house!

WARDEN. [*Strong.*] Isn't what I say the truth?

STERLING. [*Equally strong.*] No! And now get out!

WARDEN. [*Looks at his watch.*] I'll not leave this house till it's too late for you to take that eleven-twenty.

STERLING. [*More ugly.*] Yes, you will and mighty —

WARDEN. *No, I'll not!*

[*He is interrupted by the entrance of* BLANCHE, RUTH, *and* MASON.

WARDEN. [*To* BLANCHE.] I *hope* you forgive me now —

BLANCHE. [*Pathetically.*] You did right; I thank you.

STERLING. [*Heartbroken.*] Blanche — without hearing a word from me!

BLANCHE. No, I've come now to hear what *you* have to say.

[*A deep-toned clock strikes eleven.* STERLING, *at the second stroke, takes out his watch with a hurried movement.*

WARDEN. [*Quickly.*] Eleven o'clock.

STERLING. I wish Warden to leave the room.

BLANCHE. [*Firmly.*] And I wish him to stay.

[*A short pause.*

STERLING. Well, of what am I accused?

WARDEN. Nobody wants to accuse you. We want you to make a clean breast of it.

STERLING. Don't you talk to me; let my wife do the talking if you want me to answer.

BLANCHE. Sit down, Aunt Ruth. [RUTH *sits by the table,* WARDEN *stands at back.* STERLING *stands*

at Right and BLANCHE *and* MASON *sit near the centre.*] Aunt Ruth asks you to give her a true account of her trust in you. Mr. Mason is here as her friend and my father's.

STERLING. I haven't said I betrayed her trust. I told her she should *have* the bonds she wants to-morrow.

BLANCHE. But *will* she? That's what I want to know. I ask you if you haven't her bonds, to tell us here now, — tell *us*, who have been and must be still the best friends, perhaps the only friends, you can have. Tell us where we all stand — are we the only ones to suffer or are there others who will perhaps be less generous in their treatment of you? Tell us now while there is time perhaps to save us from public scandal, from the disgrace which would stamp your wife as the wife of a thief, and send your boy out into the world

the son of a convict cheat. [*She breaks down, but in a moment controls herself. There is no answer.* STERLING *sinks into a chair, his arms on the table, his head on his arms. A moment's silence.*] You *love* me — I know that. I appeal to your love; let your love of me persuade you to do what I ask. I ask it for your sake and for *mine!* Tell us here the truth now — it will spare me much to-morrow, perhaps — me whom you love — for love of me —

STERLING. [*In an agony.*] I'm afraid I'll lose you —

BLANCHE. No, I'll promise to stand by you if you'll only tell *us all* the truth.

STERLING. [*In a low, shamed voice.*] I'll tell *you*, but not *now* — not before all these others.

[BLANCHE *looks up questioningly to* MASON. MASON *shakes his head.*

BLANCHE. It *must* be *now*, Dick.

STERLING. No! no! I can't look you in the face and tell it! Let me tell it to you *alone*, later, in the dark.

[BLANCHE *looks up questioningly to* MASON. *He shakes his head.*

BLANCHE. It must be now.

STERLING. No, no, I'm too ashamed, I can't face you; in the dark I'll make a clean breast of it — let me tell you in the dark.

[WARDEN *moves and puts his hand on the electric-light button beside the doorway at back.*

WARDEN. In the DARK, then, *tell it!*

[*He presses the button and all the lights go out. The stage is in complete darkness; only the voices are heard from the different places in which the actors are last seen.*

BLANCHE. [*Quickly.*] Remember, to help you,

to help ourselves, we must know everything. Go on.

STERLING. It began fourteen months ago, after Ned Warden put me on my feet; I got a little ahead — why not get way ahead? There were plenty of men around me making their fortunes! I wanted to equal them — climb as high as they; it seemed easy enough for them, and luck had begun to come my way. We're all climbers of some sort in this world. I was a climber after wealth and everything it brings —

[*He stops a moment.*

BLANCHE. [*Her voice comes throbbing with pathetic emotion through the darkness.*] And *I* after *happiness* and all it brings.

STERLING. [*Deeply moved, his voice trembles for a moment, but only for a moment.*] Don't, Blanche, or I can't finish. Well, I borrowed on some of

Aunt Ruth's bonds and speculated — I made a hundred thousand in a week! I put back the bonds. But it had been so easy! I could see those bonds grinning at me through the iron side of the vault box. They seemed to smile and beckon, to *beg* me to take them out into the air again! They grew to be like living things to me, servants of mine to get me gold — and finally I determined to make one bigger coup than ever! I took Aunt Ruth's bonds out and all the money available in my trust, and put it *all* into this new company! It seemed so safe. I stood to be a prince among the richest! And, for a day or so, I've known nothing short of a miracle could save me from being wanted by the police! To-night I gave up even the miracle. That's all. It's no use saying I'm sorry.

[*A moment's pause.*

MASON. Have others suffered besides Miss Hunter?

STERLING. There is some money of Aunt Ruth's left — stock I couldn't transfer. But I used the money of others — Miss Godesby and Ryder's.

MASON. Miss Ruth, a large part of your fortune is gone, used unlawfully by this man. Will you resort to the law?

RUTH. [*Very quietly.*] No!

BLANCHE. [*In a voice broken with emotion and gratitude.*] Aunt Ruth!

MASON. We can't hope Miss Godesby and Ryder will be as lenient! You must go to them in the morning — tell them everything, put yourself at their mercy, ask for time and their silence.

STERLING. *Never!* I couldn't do it.

MASON. It is the only honorable way out of your dishonorable action — the least you can do!

STERLING. Confess to their faces, and probably do no good? Eat the dust at their feet, and most likely be clapped into prison for it? *No, thank you!*

BLANCHE. Suppose *I* went to them?

STERLING. You?

RUTH. No! Why should *you!*

STERLING. Yes! Why not? They might keep silent for *her!*

BLANCHE. I would do it for my boy's sake. Yes, *I'll* go.

STERLING. *Yes! You* go, Blanche.

RUTH. No, you *shan't* go — you shan't humiliate yourself in his place!

MASON. Certainly not; and if your husband is willing, we are not willing! *He* must go.

BLANCHE. But if he *won't?*

MASON. He *must!*

RUTH. You must demand his going, Blanche, and I demand it, too, as something due to me.

BLANCHE. Very well. I demand it. Will you go?

[*A moment's silence.*

WARDEN. Why don't you speak? [*He presses the electric button and all the lights come on.* STERLING *is at the doorway at back, about to steal out. There is an exclamation aloud from all of surprise and disgust. The clock strikes the quarter;* WARDEN *catches hold of* STERLING'S *arm.*] What's your hurry, Dick? There goes the quarter hour; you could never catch the eleven-twenty.

STERLING. Damn you!

[*Facing* WARDEN *squarely, as*

ACT III

At "The Hermitage," on the Bronx River, the next afternoon. The house is on the Left, and on the Right and at the back are the green lattice arches. Snow lies thick everywhere, on the benches at the Right and on the little iron table beside it, on the swing between two trees at the Right, in the red boxes of dead shrubs, on the rocks and dried grass of a "rookery" in the centre, and on the branches of the trees. CLARA *comes out from the house, followed by* TROTTER.

CLARA. Come on and let mama rest awhile — naturally she's excited and tired out, being married so suddenly and away from home. [*She stops beside the swing, taking hold of its side rope with*

her hand.] It isn't every mother who can elope without her oldest child's consent and have her youngest daughter for a bridesmaid.

[*Laughing.*

TROTTER. I hope Mrs. Sterling will forgive me. Perhaps she will when she sees how my money can help your mother and me to get right in with all the smarties!

CLARA. Oh, don't you be too sure about your getting in; it isn't as easy as the papers say! But, anyway, that wouldn't make any difference to Blanche. She was never a climber like mama and me. I suppose that's why she is asked to all sorts of houses through Aunt Ruth that wouldn't let mama and me even leave our cards on the butler!

TROTTER. I thought your mother could go anywhere she liked.

CLARA. Oh, no, she couldn't! if she made you think that, it was only a jolly! Blanche is the only one of us who really went everywhere. Come along, "*Poppa*," give me a swing! I haven't had one for years!

[*She sweeps off the snow from the seat of the swing with her hand.*

TROTTER. Your mother certainly did represent —

CLARA. [*Sitting in the swing.*] Oh, well, now don't blame mama! She couldn't help herself; she always thought you *dreadfully handsome!* Swing me!

TROTTER. I don't care, anyway. I'm deucedly proud of your mother, — I mean of *my wife*, — and I'd just as lief throw up the whole society business and go off and live happily by ourselves.

CLARA. O dear! I think mama would find

that awfully dull. Go on, swing me! [TROTTER *swings her.*] Of course, you'll find mama a little different when you see her all the time. You really won't see much more of her, though, than you do now. She doesn't get up till noon, and has her masseuse for an hour every morning, her manicure and her mental science visitor every other day, and her face steamed three times a week! She has to lie down a lot, too, but you mustn't mind that; you must remember she isn't our age!

TROTTER. [*Swings her.*] She *suits* me!

CLARA. That's just what *I feel!* You'll take care of her, and me, too, all our lives, and that's what makes me so happy. I'm full of plans! We'll go abroad soon and stay two years. [*He has stopped swinging her.*] Go on, swing me!

TROTTER. [*Holding the swing still.*] Say! if you think you are going to run me and the whole

family, you're a Dodo bird! Remember that you're my daughter; you must wait a little if you want to be a mother-in-law.

[*Sleigh-bells are heard in the distance, coming nearer.*

CLARA. Good gracious! If you ask *me*, I think mama has got her hands full. What's become of Miss Godesby and her brother?

TROTTER. When you went upstairs with your mother, they went down the road.

CLARA. You know originally the idea was *I* was to marry you.

TROTTER. Really —

CLARA. [*Laughingly.*] Yes, and mama cut me out.

TROTTER. Oh, well, it can't be helped; we can't marry everybody.

CLARA. [*Noticing the bells.*] *Somebody else*

arriving! That's queer — nobody comes here in the winter; that's why we chose it, because it would be quiet! Let's play this game.

[*Going to an iron frog on a box which stands near the house.*

TROTTER. Perhaps it's Mrs. Sterling.

CLARA. No; if she was coming at all, she'd have come in time for the wedding. [*She takes up the disks which lie beside the frog.*] I should hate to get married like you and mama — no splurge and no presents! Why, the presents'd be half the fun! And think of all those you and she've given in your life, and have lost now a good chance of getting back.

[*Throws a disk into the frog's open mouth.*

TROTTER. *I'll* give your mother all the presents she wants. I can afford it; I don't want anybody to give us anything!

CLARA. You talk like Jess! [*Throws another disk.*] You know Jess earns her own living. She goes around to smart women's houses answering their invitations and letters for 'em. She calls it being a visiting secretary, but I tell her she's a *co-respon-dent!*

[*Throws a disk.*

[WARDEN *and* MASON *enter from behind the house quickly, with a manner of suppressed excitement. They are surprised to find* CLARA *and* TROTTER.

WARDEN. Why, here they are!

MASON. No, only Miss Clara and Trotter.

WARDEN. Lucky I met you — you must take me back in your sleigh.

MASON. Yes, the riding's beastly.

TROTTER. Hello! I say, were you invited?

CLARA. Merry Christmas!

WARDEN. We came to see the Godesbys.

CLARA. They've gone down the road.

MASON. Sterling isn't here, is he?

TROTTER. No, haven't seen him.

CLARA. Do you know *why* we're here?

[MASON *and* WARDEN *are embarrassed.*

MASON. Yes — er — er — a — many happy returns, Mr. Trotter.

TROTTER. It's a great day for me, Mr. Mason!

WARDEN. Wish you joy, Trotter!

[*Embarrassed and not going near him.* TROTTER *rushes eagerly to him and grasps his hand warmly.*

TROTTER. Thank you, old man! I say! *Thank you!*

MASON. Miss Clara, would you do me the great favor of going down the road and hurrying the Godesbys back if you see them?

CLARA. Yes, I don't mind; come along, Trotty!

WARDEN. You must excuse Trotter. I want a talk with him if he will give me five minutes.

CLARA. Oh, certainly.

[*She goes out Left behind the house.*

WARDEN. [*To* MASON.] Will you see Mrs. Hunter?

TROTTER. I beg your pardon, Mrs. *Trotter!*

WARDEN. [*Politely.*] I beg yours. [*To* MASON.] See Mrs. Trotter.

MASON. [*Aside to* WARDEN.] You're going to ask *him* to go on Dick's note for Ryder?

WARDEN. [*In a low voice.*] Yes.

MASON. You're a wonder! As if *he* would!

WARDEN. *Somebody must*, and there's nobody else. That boy and that mother have got to be saved!

MASON. I'm sorry my name's no good for us.

WARDEN. And mine mustn't be used.

MASON. No, indeed! The minute that was done, there'd be a new complication, and more trouble would tumble down on Mrs. Sterling's head. Good luck.

[*Shakes his hand and enters the house.*

TROTTER. What's up? *You* haven't come to kick about my wedding, have you? I wouldn't stand for that, you know!

WARDEN. It's not that, Mr. Trotter. Your wife's son-in-law, Sterling, has turned out a blackguard; he has had intrusted to him Miss Ruth Hunter's money and several other people's, and he's used it all for speculation of his own.

TROTTER. Then he's a damned thief!

[*He sits on the bench with the manner that he has settled the subject.*

WARDEN. So he is, and he's ruined.

TROTTER. Well, prison is the place for *him.*

WARDEN. We won't argue that, but how about his family — they get punished for what he has done; they must share his disgrace.

TROTTER. Oh, well, my wife is out of all that now — *she's Mrs. Trotter.*

WARDEN. Yes, but *her own daughter* suffers.

TROTTER. [*On the defensive.*] She isn't very chummy with her classy eldest daughter.

WARDEN. Never mind that; you know without my telling you that Mrs. Sterling is a fine woman.

TROTTER. She's always snubbed me right and left, but, by George, I must own she is a fine woman.

WARDEN. That's right! [*Clapping him on the back and putting his arm around his shoulder.*] Look here — help us save her!

TROTTER. How?

WARDEN. Indorse a note of Sterling's to give Ryder to keep him quiet.

TROTTER. I'd have to ask my wife.

WARDEN. No! Don't start off like that! Keep the reins in your own hands at the very beginning, — make her realize from this very day that you're raised up on the cushion beside her; that she's sitting lower down admiring the scenery, while you do the driving through life!

TROTTER. [*Half laughing.*] Ha! I guess you're right. Box seat and reins are good enough for me!

WARDEN. Good boy! Then we can count on you to sign this note?

TROTTER. Where's *my* security?

WARDEN. I can get you security if you want it.

TROTTER. Of course I want it! And I say, where are *you?* Why aren't *you* in it?

WARDEN. There are reasons why my name had better not appear; you are in the family. But I'll tell you what I'll do, Trotter; I'll secure *you* with a note of my own — only you must keep it dark; you mustn't even let Mason know.

TROTTER. All right, perhaps I'm a Dodo bird, but I'll do it. Say, I seem to have married a good many of this classy family!

WARDEN. Trotter, no one's done you justice! And, by George! you deserve a better fate — er — I mean — my best wishes on your wedding day.

[TROTTER *shakes his hand delightedly.*

TROTTER. Great day for me! What I wanted was style and position, and some one classy who would know how to spend my money for me!

WARDEN. Well, you've got *that, surely!*

[CLARA *comes back from the house.*

CLARA. The Godesbys are coming. Trotter,

there's skating on the river near here, and they've skates in the house — don't you want a spin?

TROTTER. Yes, I don't mind — if my wife doesn't need me! [CLARA *laughs as* GODESBY *and* MISS GODESBY *enter from behind the house.* TROTTER *meets them, with* CLARA *on his arm.*] Excuse us for a little while!

CLARA. *Poppa* and I're going skating!

[*They go out Left.*

GODESBY. Hello, Warden.

WARDEN. Good morning, Miss Godesby.

MISS GODESBY. Good morning.

WARDEN. How are you, Godesby? I've come on a matter most serious, most urgent — something very painful.

GODESBY. What is it?

[*Comes forward.*

WARDEN. Both of you trusted Dick Sterling.

MISS GODESBY. What's he done?

WARDEN. Misused your funds.

GODESBY. How d'you mean?

WARDEN. I mean that the money you intrusted to him is gone, and I've come to make a proposition to you.

MISS GODESBY. Gone?

[GODESBY *and* MISS GODESBY *are aghast. A second's silence, during which* GODESBY *and* MISS GODESBY *look at each other, then back at* WARDEN.

GODESBY. Do you mean to say —

WARDEN. The money is *gone*, every penny of it, and I want you to accept a note from Sterling to cover the amount.

MISS GODESBY. I can't *grasp* it!

GODESBY. Where is Sterling? Why didn't *he* come?

WARDEN. He was ashamed.

GODESBY. I should hope so!

WARDEN. Several of us are going to stick by him; we'll manage to put him on his feet again, and we want you to accept his note.

GODESBY. [*Incredulous.*] Accept his note?

MISS GODESBY. [*Also incredulous.*] On *what security?*

GODESBY. [*Quickly.*] You'll do nothing of the sort, Julia!

MISS GODESBY. I'll see him where he belongs, in State's Prison, first!

WARDEN. That wouldn't bring you back your money.

MISS GODESBY. Neither will his note!

WARDEN. If I get it indorsed?

GODESBY. Likely!

MISS GODESBY. Rather!

WARDEN. I want your silence to keep it from the public for the family's sake. I've secured a satisfactory indorser for a note to satisfy Ryder's claim.

MISS GODESBY. Why didn't you give him to *me* instead of Ryder?

WARDEN. I felt you would be willing, out of friendship —

[*There are sleigh-bells in the distance, coming nearer.*

MISS GODESBY. Huh! you must take me for an idiot!

WARDEN. Out of friendship for his wife.

MISS GODESBY. Blanche Sterling! I never could bear her! She's always treated me like the dirt under her feet!

WARDEN. You dined with her last night.

MISS GODESBY. That was to please her mother.

No, if my money's gone, Sterling's got to suffer, and the one slight consolation I shall have will be that Blanche Sterling will have to come off her high horse.

[*The sleigh-bells stop.*

GODESBY. [*To* MISS GODESBY.] Ten to one if you agree to sign this note —

WARDEN. And keep silent.

MISS GODESBY. [*Satirically.*] Oh, yes, of course, the next morning when I wake up Sterling will be gone! Nobody knows where!

WARDEN. I've had it out with Sterling! I am here as his representative. I give you my word of honor Sterling will not run away. It is under such an understanding with him that I am pleading his case in his stead. He will stay here and work till he has paid you back, every cent.

[JESSICA *enters hurriedly from the house.*

JESSICA. [*In great excitement.*] Mr. Warden, Mr. Warden, Dick has gone!

WARDEN. *Sterling? Gone?*

MISS GODESBY. *Gone?*

GODESBY. That's *good!*

WARDEN. Don't be a fool, Godesby. How do you mean "gone," Miss Hunter?

JESSICA. I don't altogether know. While I was out this morning, Blanche received a message from mother saying she'd been —

[*She hesitates, looking toward* GODESBY *and* MISS GODESBY.

WARDEN. They know. They're your mother's guests here.

JESSICA. She told Blanche they would be glad to have her here at one o'clock for breakfast. Blanche ordered the sleigh at once and went away, leaving word for me I was

to open any message which might come for her.

WARDEN. [*To* GODESBY.] Has she been here?

GODESBY. Not that I know of.

MISS GODESBY. [*Eager to hear more.*] No, no!

JESSICA. No, they say not. She probably went first to Aunt Ruth's. Before I got back, Dick, who'd been out —

WARDEN. He was at my house.

JESSICA. Yes. He came back, questioned Jordan as to where Blanche was, went upstairs, and then went away again, leaving a note for Blanche, which I found when I came home —

WARDEN. [*Eagerly.*] Yes?

JESSICA. It simply said, "Good-by. Dick."

MISS GODESBY. [*Very angry.*] Oh!

GODESBY. [*Quickly.*] He's taken a train! He's cleared out!

WARDEN. Do you know if he took a bag or anything with him?

JESSICA. No, he took nothing of that sort. Jordan went into his room and found a drawer open and empty, a drawer in which Dick kept — a *pistol!* —

[*She drops her voice almost to a whisper.*

WARDEN. Good God, he's shot himself!

JESSICA. Perhaps not — he left the house.

WARDEN. Yes, if he were really determined to shoot himself, why wouldn't he have done it there in his own room?

JESSICA. What can we do? What can we do?

WARDEN. I'll get Mr. Mason; he's with your mother; he must go back to town at once.

[*Going to the house.*

JESSICA. He can go with me; I'd better be at the house. Some one must be there.

WARDEN. Good!

[*He goes into the house.*

[MISS GODESBY *and her brother ignore and apparently forget the presence of* JESSICA *in their excitement. They both speak and move excitedly.*

MISS GODESBY. I ought to have suspected something when Sterling told me he was getting ten per cent for my money, — the blackguard!

GODESBY. I always told you you were a fool not to take care of your money yourself! You know more about business than most men.

MISS GODESBY. I didn't want to be bothered; besides, there was always something very attractive about Sterling. I don't mind telling you that if he had fallen in love with me instead of the stiff-necked woman he married, I'd have tumbled over myself to get him.

GODESBY. How do you feel about him now?

MISS GODESBY. Now! Thank God, I'm saved such a waking up! It's going to make a big difference with my income, Howard! I wonder if his wife knew he was crooked! I'll bet you she's got a pot of money stowed away all right in her own name.

JESSICA. [*Who can bear no more, interrupts.*] Please — please! Remember that you're speaking of my sister and that every word you are saying cuts through me like a knife.

MISS GODESBY. I beg your pardon; I ought to have thought. I like and respect you, Jess, and I've been very rude.

JESSICA. You've been more than that; you've been cruelly unjust to Blanche in all that you've said!

MISS GODESBY. Perhaps I have, but I don't

feel in a very generous mood; I've some excuse — so please forgive me.

[WARDEN *reënters Left.*

WARDEN. [*To* JESSICA.] Mason is waiting for you with the sleigh. He's going first to my house. Dick may have gone back there to hear the result of my interview with Ryder, — then Mason'll try his own house and Sterling's club.

GODESBY. The *police* are the best men to find Sterling, whatever's happened.

WARDEN. [*To* GODESBY.] You wait a minute with me; I haven't finished with you yet. [*To* JESSICA.] I'll stay here for your sister, in case she comes.

[JESSICA *goes out Left.*

GODESBY. [*To* MISS GODESBY.] Don't you give in!

MISS GODESBY. Not for a minute! [*To* WAR-

DEN.] Don't you think, under the circumstances, the wedding breakfast had better be called off, and my brother and I go back to town?

WARDEN. Not till you've given me your promise, both of you, that you will keep silent about the embezzlement of your bonds for the sake of Mrs. Sterling and her son.

MISS GODESBY. [*Half laughs.*] Huh!

WARDEN. For the sake of her mother, who is your friend.

[*Sleigh-bells start up loud and die off quickly;* JESSICA *has gone.*

MISS GODESBY. Oh, come, you know what sort of friends we are, — for the amusement we can get out of each other. This is the case, — I trusted this man with my affairs. He was very attractive — I don't deny that; business with Dick Sterling became more or less of a pleasure — but that

doesn't cut any ice with me; he's stolen my money. To put it plainly, he's a common thief, and he ought to be punished; why should he go scot free and a lot of others not? You know perfectly well his note wouldn't be worth the paper it was written on; and, anyway, if he hasn't gone and sneaked out of the world, I won't lift my little finger to keep him from the punishment he deserves!

GODESBY. Good for you, Julia!

WARDEN. Don't you put your oar in, Godesby; just let this matter rest between your sister and me! She's always been known as the best man in your family.

GODESBY. You don't choose a very conciliatory way of bringing us around!

WARDEN. I'm not choosing any way at all; I'm striking right out from the shoulder. There

Isn't time for beating round the bush! I'm pleading for the good name and honorable position of a perfectly innocent, a fine, woman, and for the reputation and unimpeded career of her son! And I make that appeal as man to man and woman!

MISS GODESBY. I have nothing to do with any one in this matter but Sterling himself, who has robbed me, and I'll gladly see him suffer for it!

WARDEN. Now look here, Miss Godesby, you belong to a pretty tough crowd in society, but I know at heart you're not a bad sort! What good will it do you? Granted even that you don't care for Mrs. Sterling, still don't tell me you're the kind of woman to take a cruel pleasure in seeing another woman suffer! I wouldn't believe it! You're not one of those catty creatures! You're a clever woman, and I don't doubt you can be a pretty

hard one, too, at times; but you're *just* — that's the point now — you're *JUST* —

MISS GODESBY. [*Interrupting.*] Exactly! I'm just, an eye for an eye! Sterling is a thief, let him get the deserts of one!

[*She sits on the bench determinedly.*

WARDEN. But you can't look at only one side! You can't shut your eyes to his wife's suffering, too, and she doesn't deserve it! Neither does her boy deserve to share his disgrace. [*He sits beside her.*] Why, you have it in your power to handicap that boy through his whole life by publishing his father a criminal; or you can give that boy a fair show to prove himself more his *mother's son* than his father's, and to live an honest — who knows — perhaps a noble life!

MISS GODESBY. I refuse to accept such a responsibility. Ryder —

WARDEN. [*Rises, interrupting her.*] Ryder's word is given to be silent.

MISS GODESBY. Well, that's *his* lookout.

WARDEN. You'll have many a heart wrench, I'll bet you! You'll have to run across the results of the harm you do to Mrs. Sterling and Richard day in and day out, year after year! I don't believe you realize what it means! Why, I know *you* can't bear to see a *dog* suffer! I met you last week on the street carrying a mangy, crippled brute of a little dog in your arms, afraid lest he'd get into the hands of the vivisectionists, and yet here you'll let a boy and his mother —

MISS GODESBY. [*Interrupts him, struggling against a tiny emotion which he has stirred.*] Stop! Stop! I don't want you working on my feelings that way.

[*She rises and turns from him*

WARDEN. [*Follows her.*] I'm only knocking at the door of your heart. And now because it's opened just a tiny way, you want to shut it in my face again. Will you leave this woman's name fit for her to use? *Won't* you make that boy's life worth living to him?

MISS GODESBY. [*After a moment's pause, looks straight into* WARDEN'S *face.*] I'll tell you what I'll do. Get me some security, some sort of indorsement of Sterling's note —

WARDEN. If the man's only alive!

MISS GODESBY. And I'll hold my tongue.

WARDEN. How long will you give me?

MISS GODESBY. Oh, come, I can't have any monkey business! You must get me my security to-day.

WARDEN. To-day?

MISS GODESBY. Yes.

WARDEN. But —

MISS GODESBY. That's my last word.

GODESBY. Stick to that, Julia!

WARDEN. I shan't try to persuade her against that. Will you leave your sister alone with me a moment. Perhaps you'll see about your sleigh being ready to return to town.

GODESBY. I've no objection — if Julia wishes it.

MISS GODESBY. Yes, go on, Howard!

[GODESBY *goes out back of house.*

WARDEN. [*Left alone with* MISS GODESBY, *goes nearer to her.*] Look here! Will you accept *my* indorsement? Will *I* be all right?

MISS GODESBY. [*Incredulously.*] Certainly.

WARDEN. Then it's settled?

MISS GODESBY. You don't mean it!

WARDEN. I do.

MISS GODESBY. You'd be willing to lose —

[*A revelation comes to her.*] Oh — for *Mrs. Sterling!* I see!

WARDEN. [*Very seriously.*] I *wouldn't.* I wouldn't see.

MISS GODESBY. And she's always been blackguarding me for my affairs with men! And all the time —

WARDEN. [*Interrupts strongly.*] Don't say any more, please, *Miss Godesby!* I only wish your brother had said that much instead of you.

MISS GODESBY. [*Disagreeably.*] So you're in love with Blanche Sterling?

WARDEN. No!

MISS GODESBY. Oh, come, don't tell a lie about it; that will only make it seem worse.

WARDEN. Well, suppose I were in love with her — what of it?

MISS GODESBY. Nothing; only, my dear Warden, that woman —

WARDEN. [*Interrupts.*] Wait a minute! You've got me in a corner, but knowing half the truth, you mustn't *guess* the whole. She is even more ignorant of my love for her than you were ten minutes ago! [MISS GODESBY *smiles and makes a little satirical exclamation.*] You don't believe that, but I'll *make* you. I'm going to tell *you* something I've never even told myself. I'm going to put you to a big test, because I've got to. Apparently, I can't help myself; but after all, somehow I believe in the human nature in you, and you've got it in your power to help or hurt the woman I love — I say those words aloud for the first time — the woman I love!

[*He has finished his speech in a lowered tone throbbing with controlled feeling.*

MISS GODESBY. [*Incredulously.*] You've never told her?

WARDEN. Never; and you show how little you really know her when you ask that question! She loves her husband.

MISS GODESBY. I'm not so sure about that!

WARDEN. I am, and I *love her.* But surely the silent love of a man, like mine, is no insult to a good woman — cannot harm her! A love that is never spoken, not even whispered, can't hurt any one, except, perhaps, the one who loves. You must acknowledge even *you* have never heard a hint; you *showed* just now your real surprise at what circumstances revealed to you! I'd die sooner than bring the slightest shadow of a scandal on her, and I've hugged my secret tight. Have you any idea what such a love means? How it grows and grows, its strength shut in, held back,

doubling and redoubling its powers!—its ideality increasing, the passion *suppressed*, locked up! Good God! I tremble sometimes when I think — suppose some day it should burst out, *break* my control, MASTER ME! [*A pause.*] And here, now, I've told *you;* I'm sorry, but I had to for *her* sake again. Will you help me keep my secret?

MISS GODESBY. [*After a second's pause.*] Yes, because I believe you.

WARDEN. And Mrs. Sterling?

MISS GODESBY. [*Slowly, with sincere meaning.*] I envy her!

[*Her voice breaks and she turns away from him.*

WARDEN. No one is to know I indorse Sterling's note?

MISS GODESBY. You needn't sign the note; my brother'd have to see it. I'll take your word for the indorsement.

[*She offers him her hand. They shake hands.*

WARDEN. What a brick you are! You know you don't do yourself anything like justice in the world!

[GODESBY *reënters Left and after him a* MAN SERVANT *in ordinary clothes, who passes through the archway at back Centre.*

GODESBY. Ready!

WARDEN. [*Aside to her.*] You can promise his silence about Sterling?

MISS GODESBY. Oh, yes, he's absolutely dependent upon me.

WARDEN. Thank you.

MISS GODESBY. [*To* NED *with a forced gaiety.*] Good-by!

WARDEN. [*Again shaking her hand.*] Good-by.

[*He looks his thanks at her.*

GODESBY. Well? What did you do?

MISS GODESBY. [*As they go.*] Don't worry; I've taken care of myself for many years, and I still feel up to it!

[*They go out Left and at the same time the* SERVANT *enters from the archway at back Centre carrying some fire logs in his arms. This* SERVANT *speaks with a slight French accent. As he reaches the house,* WARDEN *stops him with a question, and the* GODESBYS' *sleigh-bells start up and quickly die away. The sun begins to set.*

WARDEN. Have you an empty sitting room?

SERVANT. Yes, sair.

WARDEN. Warm?

SERVANT. I will soon arrange a fire.

WARDEN. I wish you would, please.

SERVANT. Ze big room for ze breakfast is altogether ready and warm; you will be able to go in there now.

WARDEN. No, that wouldn't do. It's all right out here for *me*, only I am expecting a lady.

[*Sleigh-bells are heard in the distance, coming quickly nearer.*

SERVANT. Yes, sair.

WARDEN. I hear a sleigh coming. If a lady is in it, ask if her name is Mrs. Sterling, and if she says yes, tell her Mr. Warden is here and would like to speak with her a moment before she goes in to Mrs. —

[*He hesitates a second.*

SERVANT. Trottair?

WARDEN. Yes.

SERVANT. Yes, sair.

[*He goes into the house.*

[*The sun grows red, and the colors of sunset creep over the sky during the scene which*

follows. After a moment the SERVANT *shows* BLANCHE *out from the house.*

BLANCHE. [*Surprised and depressed.*] Good morning, Mr. Warden, have you been asked to these funeral baked meats?

WARDEN. No, I'll explain why I am here in a few minutes. Only let me ask you first when you last saw your husband?

BLANCHE. Early this morning.

WARDEN. And you have come just now from where?

BLANCHE. Aunt Ruth's. Of course you know about my mother? When I heard it I started to come here, but my heart failed me and I turned back to my aunt's. She has persuaded me that I ought to come and put the best face on the matter possible, but it seems as if I'd had now a little more than I *can* bear!

[*Her voice breaks and her eyes fill with tears.*

WARDEN. [*Almost tenderly.*] Shall we go inside?

BLANCHE. No, no! Let us stay out in the air; my head would burst in one of these close little rooms. Have you seen mother?

WARDEN. No, not yet.

BLANCHE. Where is Dick? Did he go to Ryder's?

WARDEN. No, but I have some good news to tell you all the same — Ryder has promised silence.

BLANCHE. [*With tremendous relief.*] Oh! that's too good, too good to be true! To whom did he promise?

WARDEN. I want you not to ask me that.

BLANCHE. I can guess, it was —

WARDEN. [*Lying.*] No, it was — *Mason.*

BLANCHE. [*Doubting him.*] Mr. Mason?

WARDEN. And I've more good news for you,

Mrs. Sterling — the *Godesbys*, too; *they* will be silent.

BLANCHE. You're sure?

WARDEN. We have their word!

BLANCHE. [*Pointedly.*] Mr. Mason again? — [WARDEN *bows his head in assent.*] He was *here?*

WARDEN. Some time ago, but only for a minute. He didn't stay; he went to find your husband.

BLANCHE. But the *Godesbys?* I just met them now on the road going back. How could Mr. Mason, if he didn't stay — [WARDEN *is embarrassed, and is silent, searching a way out of it.*] Oh, no! no! it wasn't Mr. Mason! I see the whole thing clearly. Dick was too great a coward, and *you* did it! It was *you* who won over Ryder! It was *you* who persuaded the Godesbys! — [WARDEN *shakes his head and makes a movement to deny it.* BLANCHE *continues speaking, the*

words rushing to her lips, as her pent-up heart opens and lets all her emotions suddenly free.] Don't try to deny it; you can't make me believe you! It's to *you* I owe whatever promise the future has for me! It is *you* who have given me all the happiness I've had for years. It is *you* who have watched over, taken care of, me—*you*, the best friend any woman in this world ever had. It is *you* now who have saved my boy's honor. It is *you* who lift the weight off my shoulders, the weight off my heart! You! — you! — you!

[*She sinks sobbing on the bench. It begins to snow very quietly and slowly.*

WARDEN. [*All his love bursting out into his face and into his voice, cries.*] Blanche! Blanche!

[*Leaning over her as if to protect her from her trouble and take her to his breast.*

BLANCHE. [*Rising and looking straight into*

his eyes with a suddenly revealed great love in her own.] Ned! —

[*They hold this position some moments, gazing into each other's eyes; then finally* WARDEN *makes a movement towards her, crying out more triumphantly, having read and realized her love for him.*

WARDEN. Blanche!

BLANCHE. [*Moving a half step back from him.*] No —

WARDEN. No?

BLANCHE. Look — look, it's beginning to snow!

WARDEN. [*Very softly.*] What do you mean?

BLANCHE. [*Desperately.*] I mean to speak of anything except what is in your thoughts at this moment! Help me not to forget that no matter what he has done, Dick is still my husband.

WARDEN. You don't know all he has done!

BLANCHE. How not "all"? What else? Where is he?

[*With a sudden new alarm.*

WARDEN. He has left you.

BLANCHE. [*Echoes.*] Left me? —

WARDEN. Mason is searching for him. He left a note at your house which Jess read; it was only one word "Good-by."

BLANCHE. [*Echoes again.*] Good-by! [*Sleigh-bells are heard in the distance, coming quickly nearer.*] What does it mean? You're hiding something from me! Tell me what else you know?

WARDEN. He left the house, but took something with him — something from a drawer in his room.

BLANCHE. [*After a second's pause she whispers.*] His pistol?

WARDEN. Yes.

BLANCHE. [*Aghast, still whispers.*] Has he done it?

WARDEN. I don't know; I'm waiting word from Mason.

[*The sleigh-bells stop.*

BLANCHE. [*Excited.*] But we can't wait here doing nothing; we must go, too!

WARDEN. Mason is doing all that can be done; we'd better wait here.

[*He takes her hand in sympathy, but without suggesting the passion of a few moments before.* STERLING *enters hurriedly Left. He is wild with drink and jealousy.*

STERLING. Drop my wife's hand!

[*They turn in great surprise.*

BLANCHE. Dick!

[*Fright at his appearance is mingled with her surprise.*

WARDEN. [*At the same time as* BLANCHE.] Sterling!

[*They do not drop hands.*

STERLING. [*Coming nearer, very strong.*] Drop my wife's hand! [*They do so quickly, not understanding yet.*] So I've *caught* you!

WARDEN. [*Angry.*] Caught us!

STERLING. Yes, I had my suspicions roused some time ago!

BLANCHE. Of what?

STERLING. *I* could go to the devil — what did *you two* care! I could go to State's Prison! All the better — *out of your way!*

WARDEN. You're speaking like a madman!

STERLING. I went back to my house this morning; my wife was gone — no message left where to! But I questioned the servant. She'd driven here! Why? Ha! [*A bitter half laugh;*

he turns to BLANCHE.] *You've come here once too often!*

WARDEN. [*Very strong.*] Sterling!

STERLING. [*To* WARDEN, *but ignoring his exclamation.*] Then I went to *your* house. *They knew* where *you'd* gone! You ought to train your servants better! *Both here!*

WARDEN. If you're not careful, I'll ram your insinuations down your throat.

STERLING. [*Jeers.*] "Insinuations?" I've caught you! I make no "*insinuations.*" I tell you *both you're caught!* You're my wife's lover, and she's your damned mis—

[*Interrupted.*

WARDEN. [*Seizing* STERLING *by the throat.*] Don't you finish!

BLANCHE. Sh! — for Heaven's sake! [*To* WARDEN.] Let him alone; I'm not afraid of what he says.

[WARDEN *leaves* STERLING.

STERLING. No, you never were a liar, I'll give you credit for that, — so confess the truth — you're his —

[*Interrupted.*

BLANCHE. [*Excited beyond her control.*] Listen! And you shall have the truth if you want it! These years that he's been befriending me I never dreamed of loving him nor thought of his loving me. [DICK *sneers.*] *Wait!* No, not even the day my father was buried, when I learned outright you were *dishonest!*

STERLING. [*Surprised.*] What do you mean?

BLANCHE. What I say — I learned it then from a paper of my father's. I shouldn't have kept my knowledge to myself — I see that now; but I did, for your sake, not for love of you — the love went for good that day. But here, a moment ago, I real-

ized for the first time that my old friend *did* love me, love me with an ideal devotion the noblest woman in the world might be proud of! I didn't tell him then I loved him, but now I take this chance, I *take it* GLADLY before you! — *forced by you!* I tell him now, what perhaps he has already guessed, I love him with all my heart — I *love him!* I LOVE HIM!

STERLING. Damn you both! then it's the *end* of *me!*

[*He pulls out a pistol and tries to put it to his temple.*

BLANCHE. [*Cries out.*] Ned!

WARDEN. [*Seizes* STERLING, *catches his arm, and wrenches the pistol from him.*] So that's what you planned to do, is it — make a wretched scene like that?

[*It begins to snow more heavily.*

STERLING. [*In utter collapse and shame.*] Why did you stop me? I'm better out of the world. I'm crazy with shame. First I disgraced and now I've insulted — *degraded* — the only living thing I care for, — that's my wife.

[*A moment's pause.*

BLANCHE. [*Speaks quietly.*] Come back to the house. Mr. Mason is looking for you; he has something to tell you.

STERLING. I know — more bad news.

BLANCHE. No, good.

STERLING. [*Echoes.*] Good! [*Starting to go, he turns at the porch.*] I want *you* to know that *I* know I'm a rotten beast.

[*He goes out Left.*

WARDEN. You're going back *home?*

BLANCHE. "*Home!*" [*With a faint smile.*] I should hardly call it that.

WARDEN. [*Aside to her.*] You're not afraid?

BLANCHE. [*Half smiling.*] Oh, no! And my boy's there.

[*The thick falling snow almost hides them, but they are unconscious of it.*

WARDEN. What's to be done?

BLANCHE. Wait; we'll see — we'll see — let it be something we could never regret. Good-by, Ned.

[*Giving him her hand.*

WARDEN. Good-by, Blanche.

[*Kissing her hand very tenderly and almost with a certain kind of awe, as*

THE CURTAIN SLOWLY FALLS

ACT IV

The following morning; at the STERLINGS'; *the library; a warm, livable, and lovable room, full of pictures, photographs, and books; mistletoe and holly decorate everywhere. In the bow-window at back there is a large bird-cage with half a dozen birds in it. The furniture is comfortable and heavily upholstered. At Left there is a fireplace with logs ready, but the fire is not lit. There a big table near the centre, full of magazines, illustrated papers, and books. A big arm-chair is beside the table, and other chairs conversationally close. There is a table near the door at Right, piled with Christmas gifts, still wrapped in white paper; they are tied with many*

colored ribbons and bunches of holly. There are doors Right and Left. After the curtain rises on an empty stage, RUTH *enters quickly; while she has her buoyant manner, she is, of course, more serious than usual. She carries a bunch of fresh violets in her hand. She looks about the room with a sort of curiosity. She is waiting for some one to appear. She takes up a silver-framed photograph of her brother which stands on a table and speaks aloud to it.*

RUTH. I'm glad you're spared this. [*With a long-drawn breath she places the photograph back upon the table and turns to greet* BLANCHE, *who comes in Right.*] Good morning, my dear.

[*She kisses her.*

BLANCHE. Good morning. You've had my note? [RUTH *nods.*] Thank you. I wanted to

see you before I saw any one else. You must help me decide, only *you* can.

RUTH. Have you seen your husband this morning?

BLANCHE. No. He sent word he was feeling ill, but would like to see me when I was willing.

RUTH. And you?

[*They sit near each other.*

BLANCHE. I don't want to talk with him till I see more clearly what I am going to do.

RUTH. Mr. Warden told me last night all that happened at "The Hermitage." But on your ride home with Dick?

BLANCHE. We never spoke. [*She rises.*] Aunt Ruth, I am going to leave him.

RUTH. [*Rising.*] No!

BLANCHE. [*Walking up and down.*] Why not? *Everybody* does.

RUTH. [*Going to her.*] That's just it. *Be somebody!* Don't do the easy, weak thing. Be strong; be an example to other women. Heaven knows it's time they had one!

[MRS. HUNTER *enters Right.* BLANCHE *meets her.*

MRS. HUNTER. Good morning, my poor dear.

[*Going to kiss* BLANCHE.

BLANCHE. [*Taking* MRS. HUNTER'S *hand and not kissing her.*] Good morning.

MRS. HUNTER. Clara's gone upstairs to see little Richard. Good morning, Ruth.

[*She adds this with a manner of being on the defensive.*

RUTH. [*Dryly.*] Good morning.

MRS. HUNTER. [*Sitting by the table and looking at the picture papers.*] Isn't it awful! What are you going to do?

BLANCHE. I don't know yet, mother.

MRS. HUNTER. *Don't know?* Absolute divorce — no legal separation! [*To* RUTH.] We're staying at the Waldorf.

[BLANCHE *sits discouragedly on the sofa.*

RUTH. [*Sitting beside her.*] I shall advise against, and do everything in my power to prevent, Blanche's getting a divorce!

MRS. HUNTER. You don't mean to say you'll carry those ridiculous notions of yours into practice? — now that a scandal has come into our very family?

RUTH. Oh, I know selfish, cynical, and worldly people won't agree with me, and I pity and sympathize with Blanche from the bottom of my heart. [*Taking and holding* BLANCHE'S *hand.*] But I want her not to decide anything now; wait till the first blows over, and then — well, then I

feel sure she will do the strong, noble thing — the difficult thing — not the easy.

BLANCHE. [*Withdraws her hand from* RUTH'S.] *No*, you ask too much of me, Aunt Ruth; I can't do it.

RUTH. I say don't decide now — wait.

BLANCHE. I don't want to wait. I want to decide now and to cut my life free, entirely, from Dick's.

RUTH. You used to agree with me. I've heard you decry these snapshot, rapid-transit, tunnel divorces many a time. I've heard you say when a woman has made her bed, she must lie in it — make the best of her bad bargain.

BLANCHE. I always sympathized with a woman who sought a divorce in this state.

RUTH. Oh, yes, but *you can't*, can you?

BLANCHE. No, but I'm not strong enough to fight out an unhappy life for the sake of setting an

example to other women — women who *don't want* the example set!

RUTH. Blanche, I counted on you to be strong, to be big —

BLANCHE. [*With a voice full of emotion.*] But I love Ned Warden. He loves me — life stretches out long before us. Dick has disgraced us all. I don't love him — should I give *my* happiness and Mr. Warden's happiness for *him?*

MRS. HUNTER. Absurd! We all have a right to happiness if we can get it. I have chosen; let Blanche follow my example.

BLANCHE. [*Disgusted.*] *Yours?* [*Rises.*] Oh!

RUTH. [*Following up the advantage.*] Yes, Blanche, do you want to follow your mother's example?

BLANCHE. No! But the cases are not analogous!

MRS. HUNTER. Not what? You needn't fling any innuendoes at Mr. Trotter; it's he who said it was my duty to stand by you, advise you, and all that sort of thing. I'm not here to please myself! Goodness knows, a divorce court isn't a very pleasant place to spend your honeymoon!

BLANCHE. Thank both you and Mr. Trotter, mother; but I ask you to allow Aunt Ruth and me to decide this matter between us.

MRS. HUNTER. Trotter says *divorce* was *made* for woman!

RUTH. And what was made for man, please? Polygamy?

MRS. HUNTER. I don't know anything about politics! But I could count a dozen women in a breath, all divorced, or trying to be, or *ought* to be!

RUTH. And each one of them getting a cold shoulder.

BLANCHE. What of it if their hearts are warm — poor climbers after happiness!

RUTH. Believe me, dear, the chill spreads. You're going to be selfish?

MRS. HUNTER. She's going to be sensible.

[CLARA *enters Right.*

CLARA. Hello, everybody! I just saw Dick coming out of his room and I cut him dead.

BLANCHE. Clara!

RUTH. [*To* BLANCHE.] You've taken a certain responsibility upon yourself, and you can't shirk it.

BLANCHE. He isn't what I thought him!

RUTH. The day the sun shone on you as a bride, in God's presence, you said you took him for better for worse —

CLARA. Dear me, is that in it? The marriage service ought to be expurgated!

RUTH. [*To* CLARA.] I'm ashamed of you.

CLARA. That's nothing new!

BLANCHE. Aunt Ruth, let us talk some other time.

MRS. HUNTER. Oh, if we are in the way, we'll go!

[*Rises.*

CLARA. Yes, come on, let's go to Atlantic City.

MRS. HUNTER. No, I'd rather go to Lakewood.

CLARA. Oh, pshaw, Lakewood's no fun! I'm surprised you don't say go to Aiken, North Carolina.

MRS. HUNTER. Mr. Trotter says we can't leave town anyway while Blanche is in this trouble.

BLANCHE. Mother, please discuss your affairs somewhere else.

RUTH. And if I may be permitted to suggest, you will find Mr. Trotter's advice always pretty good to follow. That young man has better qualities than we have suspected. I have some-

thing to thank him for; will you be good enough to ask him to come and see me?

MRS. HUNTER. He will not go to your house with my permission. I shall tell him you have never asked me inside your door.

CLARA. Mother, if you ask *me* — [MRS. HUNTER *interjects* "Which I don't," *but* CLARA *continues without paying any attention to the interruption.*] — I don't think Mr. Trotter is going to cry himself to sleep for your permission about anything!

MRS. HUNTER. [*To* BLANCHE.] Good-by, my dear; if you want me, let me know; I'll be glad to do anything I can. I'm staying at the Waldorf.

CLARA. It's full of people from Kansas and Wyoming Territory come to hear the Opera!

RUTH. A little western blood wouldn't hurt our New York life a bit!

CLARA. Ah! Got you there! The west is the place where the divorces come from!

MRS. HUNTER. [*Laughs.*] What's the matter with Providence? I think Rhode Island tips the scales pretty even for the east!

BLANCHE. Please go, mother; please leave me for a little while.

MRS. HUNTER. Oh, very well, good-by! [LEONARD *enters Right with a Christmas parcel, which he places on the table Right.*] Dear me, have you had all these Christmas presents and not opened them?

BLANCHE. It is only little Richard in this house who is celebrating Christmas to-day.

MRS. HUNTER. It's a terrible affair; I only hope the newspapers won't get hold of it. [*To* LEONARD.] If any women come here asking for *me* who look like ladies, don't let 'em in! They ain't my friends; they're reporters.

[LEONARD *bows and goes out.*

CLARA. I'm awfully sorry, Blanche, I honestly am; but I think you'll have only yourself to blame if you don't strike out now and throw Dick over. Good-by!

[MRS. HUNTER *and* CLARA *go out Right.*

BLANCHE. I wish *they* wouldn't advise me to do what I *want* to.

RUTH. Ah!

BLANCHE. But who do I harm by it? Surely, it wouldn't be for *his* good to be brought up under the influence of his father!

RUTH. If he saw you patiently bearing a cross for the sake of duty, can you imagine a stronger force for good on the boy's character? What an example *you* will set him! What a chance for a mother!

BLANCHE. But my own life, my own happiness?

RUTH. Ah, my dear, that's just it! The watch-word of our age is self! We are all for ourselves; the twentieth century is to be a glorification of selfishness, the Era of Egotism! Forget yourself, and what would you do? The dignified thing. You would live quietly *beside* your husband if not *with* him. And your son would be worthy of such a mother!

BLANCHE. And I?

RUTH. You would be *glad* in the end.

BLANCHE. Perhaps —

RUTH. Surely! Blanche, for twenty years Mr. Mason and I have loved each other.

[BLANCHE *is astonished. There is a pause.*

[RUTH *smiles while she speaks, though her voice breaks.*]

You never guessed! Ah, well, your father knew.

BLANCHE. But Mrs. Mason is hopelessly insane; surely —

RUTH. A principle is a principle; I took my stand against divorce. What can you do for a principle if you don't give up everything for it? Nothing! And that is what I mean. To-day I am not sorry — I am happy.

[*There is another slight pause.* RICHARD *is heard upstairs singing a Christmas carol, "Once in Royal David's City," etc.*

BLANCHE. [*With great emotion.*] But if it breaks my heart — if it breaks my heart?

RUTH. Hearts don't break from the pain that comes of doing right, but from the sorrow of doing wrong! [*Neither woman speaks for a minute; in the silence* RUTH *hears* RICHARD.] What's that?

BLANCHE. [*Hearing now for the first time.*] Richard singing one of his carols.

RUTH. I'd forgotten it *was* Christmas.

[LEONARD *enters Left.*

LEONARD. Doctor Steinhart is here to see Mr. Sterling. Where shall I show him, madame?

BLANCHE. Here; we'll go —

[*Rising.*

LEONARD. Yes, madame.

[*He goes out.*

RUTH. Well? What are you going to do?

BLANCHE. I'm *thinking* —

RUTH. May I come with you, or shall I —

BLANCHE. No, come.

[*The two women start to leave the room together Right, with their arms around each other. They meet* STERLING, *who enters; he starts, they stop.*

STERLING. I beg your pardon, I didn't know you were here.

BLANCHE. We are going to my room; I am sorry you are not well.

STERLING. Oh, it's nothing, thank you.

RUTH. If we can do anything, let us know.

STERLING. [*Overwhelmed with shame, bows his head.*] Thank you.

[*The women go out Right. At the same moment* DR. STEINHART *is shown in by* LEONARD *Left.*

DR. STEINHART. Good morning, Sterling.

STERLING. Good morning, doctor; sit down.

DR. STEINHART. No, thanks, I'm very rushed this morning. What can I do for you?

STERLING. I've been drinking too much for some time; I can't eat — my nerves are all gone to pieces. I've some — some business troubles, and I haven't slept for a week.

DR. STEINHART. Is that all! Brace up, help

yourself a little, and we can soon make a man of you.

STERLING. I'm afraid it would take more than a doctor to do that.

DR. STEINHART. Oh, come, we must get rid of melancholy. Come and drive with me to 79th Street.

STERLING. No, I'm too worn out. Look at my hand! [*Holds out a trembling hand.*] I tell you literally I haven't slept for weeks — I thought you'd give me some chloral or something.

DR. STEINHART. What? Now?

STERLING. Yes; I've tried sulphonal and all that rot; it doesn't have any effect on me. Give me a hypodermic —

DR. STEINHART. Nonsense! Come out into the air!

STERLING. I've *been* out.

DR. STEINHART. Good! Then try lying down again, and perhaps you'll go to sleep *now*.

STERLING. Very well, but give me something to take to-night in case I can't sleep then.

DR. STEINHART. [*Takes out a note-book and writes with a stylographic pen.*] Be careful what you eat to-day. How about this drinking — did your business trouble come after it began, or did the whiskey come after the business trouble?

STERLING. That's it.

DR. STEINHART. Um — [*Giving* STERLING *the paper which he tears out of his note-book.*] Look here, I've a busy day before me; but I'll look in to-morrow, and we'll have a good talk.

STERLING. Thank you. I say, what *is* this?

DR. STEINHART. It's all right. Sulphate of morphia — one-quarter-grain tablets.

STERLING. Isn't that very little?

DR. STEINHART. Oh, no; you try one, and repeat in an hour if it hasn't done its work.

STERLING. But you've only given me two tablets, and I tell you I'm awfully hard to influence!

DR. STEINHART. Two's enough; we don't give a lot of drugs to a man in a nervous condition like yours. Don't let them wake you for luncheon if you're asleep. Sleep's best for you. Good-by — pleasant dreams.

[*He goes out Left.*

STERLING. [*Reads off the prescription.*] "Two one-quarter-grain tablets sulphate of morphia, Wm. B. Steinhart — " And in *ink!* Why didn't he write it with a lead-pencil? How can I make it more? Two — wait a minute! Two! [*Taking out his own stylographic pen.*] What's his ink? [*Makes a mark with his pen on his cuff.*] Good! the same! Why not make it twelve? [*Marking*

a one before the two.] Just in case — I might as well be on the safe side!

[*He rings an electric bell beside the mantel, and waves the paper in the air to dry it.* BLANCHE *enters Right.*

BLANCHE. I heard the doctor go. Is anything serious the matter?

STERLING. *If* it were my *body* only that had gone wrong, Blanche!

[LEONARD *enters Left.*

[*To* LEONARD.] Take this prescription round the corner and have it put up.

LEONARD. Yes, sir.

STERLING. And bring it to me with a glass of water.

LEONARD. Yes, sir.

[*He goes out Left.*

[BLANCHE *is still standing.* STERLING *sinks into a chair, and puts his head in his hands, his*

elbows on the table. He lifts his head and looks at her.

STERLING. I know what you're going to do; you don't have to tell me; of course you're going to divorce me.

BLANCHE. No.

STERLING. What!

[*His hands drop to the table; he looks her straight in the face, doubting what he hears.*

BLANCHE. [*Looking back into his eyes.*] No.

STERLING. [*Cries.*] Blanche!

[*In a tone of amazement and joy.*

BLANCHE. I give you one more chance, for your sake *only as my boy's father.* But — *don't make it impossible for me* — do you understand?

STERLING. Yes! I must take the true advantage of this chance your goodness gives me. I must right myself, so that people need not hesitate to

speak of his father in Richard's presence. *And this I will do.* [*With great conviction he rises.*] I know I am at the cross-roads, and I know the way; *but* I don't choose it for *your* reasons; I choose for my own reason — which is that, unfit as *I am, I love you.*

[*He speaks deliberately and with real feeling, bending over her.*

BLANCHE. I tell you truly my love for you is gone for good.

STERLING. I'll win it back — you *did* love me, you *did*, didn't you, Blanche?

BLANCHE. I loved the man I thought you were. Do you remember that day in the mountains when we first really came to know each other, when we walked many, many miles without dreaming of being tired?

STERLING. And found ourselves at sunset at the

top instead of below, by our hotel! Oh, yes, I remember! The world changed for me that day.

[*He sinks back into the arm-chair, overcome, in his weakened state, by his memories and his realization of what he has made of the present.*

BLANCHE. And for me! I knew then for the first time you loved me, and that I loved you. Oh! how short life of a sudden seemed! Not half long enough for the happiness it held for me! [*She turns upon him with a vivid change of feeling.*] Has it turned out so?

STERLING. How different! Oh, what a beast! what a fool!

BLANCHE. [*Speaking with pathetic emotion, tears in her throat and in her eyes.*] And that early summer's day you asked me to be your wife! [*She gives a little exclamation, half a sob, half a laugh.*] It was in the corner of the garden; I can

smell the lilacs now! And the raindrops fell from the branches as my happy tears did on father's shoulder that night, when I said, "Father, he will make me the happiest woman in the world!"

STERLING. O God! to have your love back!

BLANCHE. You can't breathe life back into a dead thing; how different the world would be if one could!

STERLING. You can bring back life to the drowned; perhaps your love is only drowned in the sorrow I've caused.

BLANCHE. [*Smiles sadly and shakes her head; the smile dies away.*] Life to me then was like a glorious staircase, and I mounted happy step after step led by your hand till everything *seemed* to culminate on the day of our wedding. You men don't, *can't* realize, what that service means to a girl. In those few moments she parts from all

that have cherished her, made her life, and gives her whole self, her love, her body, and even her soul sometimes — for love often overwhelms us women — to *the* man who, she believes, wants, *starves*, for her gifts. All that a woman who marries for love feels at the altar I tell you a *man* can't understand! You treated this gift of mine, Dick, like a child does a Santa Claus plaything — for a while you were never happy away from it, then you grew accustomed to it, then you broke it, and now you have even lost the broken pieces!

STERLING. [*Comes to her, growing more and more determined.*] I will *find* them, and put them together again.

BLANCHE. [*Again smiles sadly and shakes her head.*] First we made of *every Tuesday* a festival — our wedding anniversary. After a while we kept the twenty-eighth of *every month!* The second

year you were satisfied with the twenty-eighth of April only, and last year you forgot the day altogether. And yet what a happy first year it was!

STERLING. Ah, you see I *did* make you happy once!

BLANCHE. Blessedly happy! Our long silences in those days were not broken by an oath and a fling out of the room. Oh, the happiness it means to a wife to see it is hard for her husband to leave her in the morning, and to be taken so quickly — even roughly — into his arms at night that she knows he has been longing to come back to her. Nothing grew tame that first year. And at its end I climbed to the highest step I had reached yet, when you leaned over my bed and cried big man's tears, the first I'd ever seen you cry, and kissed me first, and then little Richard lying on my warm arm, and said, "God bless you, little mother." [*There is a pause.* BLANCHE *cries softly a moment.* STERLING

is silent, ashamed. Again she turns upon him, rousing herself, but with a voice broken with emotion.] And what a *bad* father you've been to that boy!

STERLING. I didn't mean to! That's done, that's past, but Richard's my boy. I'll make him proud of me, somehow! I'll win your love back — you'll see!

[BLANCHE *is about to speak in remonstrance, but stops because of the entrance of* LEONARD. *He brings a small chemist's box of tablets in an envelope and a glass of water on a small silver tray.*

LEONARD. Your medicine, sir.

[*He puts it on the table and goes out Right.*

STERLING. Thank you, thank you!

[*He takes the box of tablets out of the envelope.*

BLANCHE. [*Going to him.*] *You don't realize* why I've told you all this!

STERLING. [*Counting out the tablets.*] One, two. To give me hope! To give me hope!

[*He empties the other ten tablets into the envelope, twists it up, and throws it in the fireplace.*

BLANCHE. No, no, just the opposite!

STERLING. Then you've defeated your end, dear; you will stay here with me.

BLANCHE. [*Trying to make him realize the exact position.*] Opposite you at the table, receiving our friends, keeping up appearances, yes — but nearer to you than that? No! Never!

STERLING. But you *will* stay?

[LEONARD *enters from Left.*

LEONARD. Miss Godesby, Mr. Warden.

[*They enter.*

[*All greet each other.* WARDEN *nods stiffly to* STERLING, *barely acknowledging his greeting.*

MISS GODESBY. [*To* STERLING, *purposely speak-*

ing with good-humored raillery to relieve the tension of the situation.] Well, you're a nice lot, aren't you?

STERLING. I'm so ashamed! I'm so ashamed!

MISS GODESBY. Oh, never mind that now.

BLANCHE. I have no words to thank you with.

MISS GODESBY. Oh, that's all right. The truth is, I've made Warden bring me here, Sterling, for a bit of business. I had an emotional moment yesterday and went off my head a bit. I stand by what I said as to keeping quiet, but — well, I'm like any other old maid who hates dust on her mantelpiece — I'm fidgety not to make some sort of a bluff at putting this thing on a business basis.

WARDEN. Excuse me, Miss Godesby, I think Sterling ought to know the truth.

STERLING. *Now* what?

MISS GODESBY. Well, the truth is, my fool of a

brother has kicked up an infernal row, and refuses to hold his tongue.

STERLING. Then I'm ruined after all!

MISS GODESBY. Wait, I've left him with Mr. Mason. I feel certain I can assure his silence if I can only show him some sort of an agreement to pay, an acknowledgment of the — the — affair, signed and sealed.

BLANCHE. Signed by whom?

MISS GODESBY. Your husband and yourself will do.

STERLING. But both names are worthless.

MISS GODESBY. Not as a point of honor.

STERLING. Ah! no, not my wife's.

MISS GODESBY. Nor yours to me. Come along!

[*She goes to the table with* STERLING, *and unfolding a paper gives it to him. He signs it.*

WARDEN. [*Aside to* BLANCHE, *apologizing for his presence.*] She made me come — she wouldn't come alone; otherwise I should have waited till you sent for me.

BLANCHE. It's as well — I've decided. Oh, I wonder if I'm doing wrong.

[*Looking him straight in the face.*

WARDEN. [*Looking back searchingly in hers to read the truth, but believing that she will certainly leave her husband.*] No, *you* can't do wrong! But I must warn you of one thing — I'm not any longer the controlled man I was.

MISS GODESBY. Come along now, Mrs. Sterling, brace up and give me your name, and Warden, witness, please. [*They do so.*] Of course, my dears, I know perfectly well that legally this isn't worth the paper it's written on. [*Exchanging a serious and meaning look with* WARDEN.] But my

idiot of a brother won't realize that, which is the point. One thing more — will you both dine with me next week, Thursday? [*There is an embarrassed pause, which, with quick intuition, she understands.*] Yes, you *will* — for *silence* gives consent! [*Laughing.*] Now, that's settled!

STERLING. What an awfully good sort you are!

MISS GODESBY. Thanks, not always — I've been a mucker more than once in my life! I must go [*Shaking hands with* BLANCHE.] and relieve Mr. Mason of my brother, or he'll be accusing me of inhuman treatment; more than one consecutive hour of my brother ought to be prevented by the police.

BLANCHE. You are very, *very* good.

MISS GODESBY. I think if you and I can get well over this, we'll be real friends, and I haven't many, have you?

BLANCHE. [*Takes her hand.*] You can count upon me and my boy so long as we live.

[*She impulsively but tenderly kisses her.*

[MISS GODESBY *is very much surprised, but moved.*

MISS GODESBY. [*Half laughing, half crying, and pulling her veil down to hide her emotion.*] By George! I haven't been kissed by a woman for years! Good-by.

[WARDEN *starts to go out with* MISS GODESBY. BLANCHE *stops him.*

BLANCHE. Wait one moment — I want to speak alone to Miss Godesby.

[MISS GODESBY *goes out Left.*

BLANCHE. [*Aside to* STERLING.] You tell him; I cannot. Tell him the *truth.*

[*She goes out after* MISS GODESBY

WARDEN. Dick.

STERLING. Ned?

WARDEN. I have nothing to say to you, Sterling.

[WARDEN *looks away and whistles a tune to show his unwillingness to listen.* STERLING *speaks clearly so* WARDEN *shall hear.*

STERLING. I have a message for you from my wife. [*There is a second's pause.* WARDEN *stops whistling and turns and looks at* STERLING.] She asks me to explain — to tell — to tell you a decision she has come to.

[*There is another pause.*

WARDEN. Yes?

[*Anxious, at a supreme tension, and now a little alarmed as to the decision.*

STERLING. She has decided not to leave my house.

WARDEN. [*Adds.*] *Yet!*

STERLING. *Ever!*

WARDEN. [*Losing his control.*] That's a lie!

STERLING. I couldn't believe it, either, when she told me. It was her first word to me to-day. I said, "You are going to divorce me," and she answered, "No."

WARDEN. She's sacrificing herself for some reason — her boy!

STERLING. Never mind, she won't leave me; I have her promise, and I'll win back her love!

WARDEN. You fool! You can't win her back! She would never have loved me if you hadn't disillusioned, *dishonored* her! I'm not worthy of her, but I'll never dishonor her, and, please God, never disappoint her, and so I'll keep her love.

STERLING. Well, as to that, she decides to stay, leaving love out of the question.

WARDEN. And you'll accept that sacrifice! You don't even *love* her. You're only thinking

of *yourself* now. Love, real love, forgets itself. You, after having spoilt half her life, are willing to spoil the rest, for *your own sake!*

STERLING. No, for the boy's sake, and her sake — to save a scandal — the world —

[*Interrupted.*

WARDEN. [*Beside himself.*] Oh, damn the world! It's *heaven* and *hell* you'd better think of. *Scandal!* It couldn't harm *her*, and the hurt it would do you is a small price to pay. Those whom *God* has joined — yes! but it was the devil bound her to you!

STERLING. Here! I've had enough! Look out!

WARDEN. [*Moves toward him.*] *You* look out — you shan't rob her of her happiness. You — a drunkard! A forger! A thief!

STERLING. *I'd keep her now if only to spite you!*

WARDEN. Hah! There spoke the true man in you! Would to heaven the old days of duelling were back!

STERLING. A brave wish, as you know they're not!

WARDEN. They fight in other countries still for their love and honor, and I'm ready here, now, if you are, with any weapons you choose!

[STERLING *sneers.*]

Sneer! But will you fight? We'll find a place, and something to fight with, or fists if you'd rather! You wouldn't kill me before I'd got you out of her way for good. Will you fight?

[*Coming closer to him.*

STERLING. No!

WARDEN. [*Getting more and more enraged.*] If *you lose, you go away*, and set her free of your own will!

STERLING. *No!*

WARDEN. [*Losing entirely his self-control.*] What do you want to *make* you fight — will that?

[*He gives him a stinging blow in the face.*

STERLING. Yes!

[*He springs toward* WARDEN *as* RUTH *and* MASON *enter Left. The two men stand rigid,* WARDEN *breathing heavily.*

RUTH. Blanche, may I bring in — where's Blanche?

STERLING. I don't know.

MASON. Good morning, gentlemen.

[*There is no response.* WARDEN *is with great difficulty restraining himself. His lips are compressed tightly and his hands clenched.*

RUTH. What's the trouble?

STERLING. I have just told Warden my wife's decision not to leave me.

RUTH. [*Showing her relief and satisfaction in her face, turns to* WARDEN.] You won't try to shake that resolve?

WARDEN. [*Unable to control himself.*] But I will! I *will* — I tell you all! I hardly know what I say or do! But look out for me, I'm desperate! I'm a torrent that's only let loose since yesterday, and now all of a sudden you try to stop me! But it's too late; I've got my impetus; the repressed passion of years is behind me; nothing can stop me — and God keep me from doing the wrong thing! I am determined to clear him out of the way of the happiness of the woman I love. [*To* RUTH.] Do you mean to say you approve of her decision? [RUTH *turns her head; he turns to* MASON.] Do *you?*

RUTH. No.

STERLING. [*To* RUTH, *holding out his hand.*]

You will stand by me, Aunt Ruth, and together we —

RUTH. [*Interrupting and refusing his hand.*] Oh, no.

STERLING. Don't you think I can win her love back?

RUTH. No.

STERLING. Won't you help me try?

RUTH. No. It would be useless.

WARDEN. Come with me to Blanche; I must speak with her.

[WARDEN *and* RUTH *go out Right.*

MASON. [*Alone with* STERLING.] Go away and make your wife understand you are never coming back.

STERLING. But the loneliness, the misery, away — alone.

MASON. Kill them with hard work; *you have*

other heavy debts, you know. I came to see you about this business of your acknowledgments to Miss Godesby and Miss Hunter.

STERLING. Later, later. To-morrow I will decide —

[*He motions him away.* MASON *goes to him and puts his hand on his shoulder.*

MASON. Decide well —

[*He hesitates a moment and then goes out Right.*

STERLING. [*Watching him go.*] There's not one soul in this world who cares for me, and it's my *own fault.* [RICHARD *is heard upstairs again singing "Once in Royal David's City."* STERLING *lifts his head and listens.*] Yes, one little soul loves me, and it would be better for him, too, if I went away. I'll go to sleep and see how I feel about it when I wake up. [*He moves the glass of water and takes out the box of tablets. He starts*

suddenly, but very slightly, and his muscles tighten.] After all, why not end it all *now*, at once, without any more bother? [*He looks in the box, and glances up questioningly; then he remembers the fireplace where he threw the other tablets and looks across the room at the logs. He rises, goes over, and sees in the fireplace the twisted envelope which holds the other tablets. He bends over to pick it up; he stops short.*] No! Why shouldn't I try it, anyway? She, herself, gives me the chance! [*He rings the electric bell, and walking away from the fireplace, takes up with a trembling hand the papers left by* MASON; *he wipes the damp from his forehead with his handkerchief. To* JORDAN, *who enters Left.*] Light the fire quickly; I feel cold.

[*He sinks into the arm-chair, weak from the mental strain.*

LEONARD. It's very warm in the house, sir.

STERLING. Do as I tell you — light the fire.

LEONARD. [*Looking for matches on the mantel, finds the box empty.*] There are no matches, sir; I must get one.

STERLING. No, don't go — here — here —

[*He gives him a match from his own box.* LEONARD *notices the trembling hand and suppressed excitement of* STERLING, *and involuntarily glances up, but quickly looks back to his work and strikes a match. The match goes out.*

LEONARD. I shall need another match, please, sir.

STERLING. [*With one in his fingers taken from his match-box, he alters his mind.*] I have no more. [*He puts away his match-box.*] Never mind the fire; get me a pint bottle of champagne.

LEONARD. [*With a surreptitious side glance of curiosity.*] Very well, sir.

[*He goes out Left.*

STERLING. That was funny; that was very funny! I wonder if it was accident, or if there's such a thing as fatality. [*He goes to the fireplace and picks up the twisted envelope.*] If not now — perhaps some other time — who knows? [*He thrusts the envelope in his vest pocket, and takes up the papers again from the table to look over them.*] I can't read these things! [*Throwing them down.*] The words mean nothing to me!

[*There is the sound outside of a cork being drawn.*

LEONARD *enters with the champagne and a glass and places them beside* STERLING.

LEONARD. Shall I light the fire now, sir?

STERLING. No, never mind now.

LEONARD. Yes, sir.

[*He goes out Left*

[STERLING *half fills the glass with champagne*

He takes out the box of tablets and counts aloud.

STERLING. One, two, three, four — [*He puts all in the glass, dropping them as he counts. He hesitates, then quickly drops in two more and drinks quickly. The glass is empty. He sits by the table thinking a moment, then takes a piece of paper and makes ready his stylographic pen.*] Let me see; can I make it seem accidental; it would be so much less bother and trouble for them! [*He thinks a second, then writes.*] "I have accidentally taken an overdose of my sleeping draught. I have tried to call some one, but it's no use. I ask only one thing, that you forget all my sins, wipe out their memory with my name. I want my boy to change his name, too." [*He hesitates a moment, and then scratches that sentence heavily out.*] No, I won't say that. [*He waits a moment.*] God in

heaven, what wouldn't I give for one friendly word just now! Some one to sort of say *good-by* to me — take my hand — even a *servant!*

[*He looks about him, showing signs of drowsiness. The door Right bursts open.* STERLING *quickly hides the letter in his inside pocket as* WARDEN *comes in.*

WARDEN. My hat! Where's my hat!

[*He looks about for it*

STERLING. [*Quietly.*] Ned?

WARDEN. My hat, I say! Where's my hat?

[*Looking.*

STERLING. Ned!

[*Something in his voice arrests* WARDEN'S *attention.*

WARDEN. What? [*He looks at him.*] What's the matter —

STERLING. Nothing — I'm half asleep, that's

all — the reaction — I'm worn out and I've changed my mind —

WARDEN. How do you mean?

STERLING. I'm going away for good — that's the best I can do; I want you to forgive me — *could* you? What do you say? Forgive me for everything! For the sake of the old schoolboy days —

WARDEN. When are you going?

STERLING. To-day. Will you say good-by to me and wish me well on my journey?

WARDEN. [*Speaks without sympathy.*] You can count on me always to help you in any way I can. You can still retrieve a good deal if you're strong enough.

STERLING. I know what a beastly friend I've been, and yesterday was more than any man would stand, but forgive that, too, will you? I've always been a bad lot!

WARDEN. [*Goes to him and speaks, with the sympathy of a man for a child coming into his voice.* No, a weak lot; that's been your ruin, Dickie. I'll see you again before you go.

STERLING. No, I'm going to sleep as long as I can now, and I don't want any one to wake me up; but when I do wake, I shall have other things to do. This is good-by.

WARDEN. Well, good luck! [*He starts to go. The two men look at each other, and finally* STERLING *gets the courage to hold out his hand.* WARDEN *hesitates a moment, then shakes it.*] Good luck!

[*He goes out Left.*

[STERLING, *who has been growing more and more drowsy, as soon as he is alone, goes with difficulty to the door and locks it. He is so drowsy that he leans against the door for a moment; then he starts to go back to the table, but is unable to*

get there and sinks on the sofa half way between the table and the door. His eyes close, but suddenly he starts violently and tries to rise, but cannot, crying out faintly.

STERLING. Good God — the money! I forgot the money — who'll pay my debts? Ah, this is a fitting climax for my life — the weakest, dirtiest thing I've done — [*He gets the letter from his pocket and holds it in his hand; the light of the afternoon grows slowly dim, like his fading sight and senses. He murmurs twice in a faint, drowsy voice.*] Coward! Coward!

[BLANCHE, *in the hall outside Right, calls his name.*

BLANCHE. Dick!

[STERLING'S *body relaxes and sets. The letter drops from his lifeless hands.*

[BLANCHE *enters with* RUTH, *followed by*

RICHARD, *who rides a stick with a horse's head and wears a soldier's cap.*

RICHARD. Merry Christmas, father!

BLANCHE. [*Going toward the sofa.*] Dick!

RICHARD. Merry Christmas, father!

BLANCHE. Sh! Father's asleep.

[*They steal back toward the other door when* WARDEN *enters Right.*

WARDEN. Oh, you are here! I went down into the drawing-room where I left you.

BLANCHE. Sh!

[*She points to* STERLING, *who lies apparently asleep. They speak in lowered voices.*

WARDEN. Yes, I have a message for you from him.

[*Looking at* RICHARD *and* RUTH.

RUTH. [*Who understands.*] Come, Richard, I haven't seen your tree yet.

[*She goes out Right with* RICHARD

WARDEN. [*To* BLANCHE.] Give me your hand.

[*She does so wonderingly.*

WARDEN. [*Softly, with a man's tenderness in his voice.*] He is going away for good.

BLANCHE. Away?

WARDEN. For good.

BLANCHE. [*Slowly, withdrawing her hand.*] For good? [*She looks over toward* STERLING, *and then back to* WARDEN.] What does he mean?

WARDEN. We will know when he wakes.

THE CURTAIN STEALS SOFTLY DOWN

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